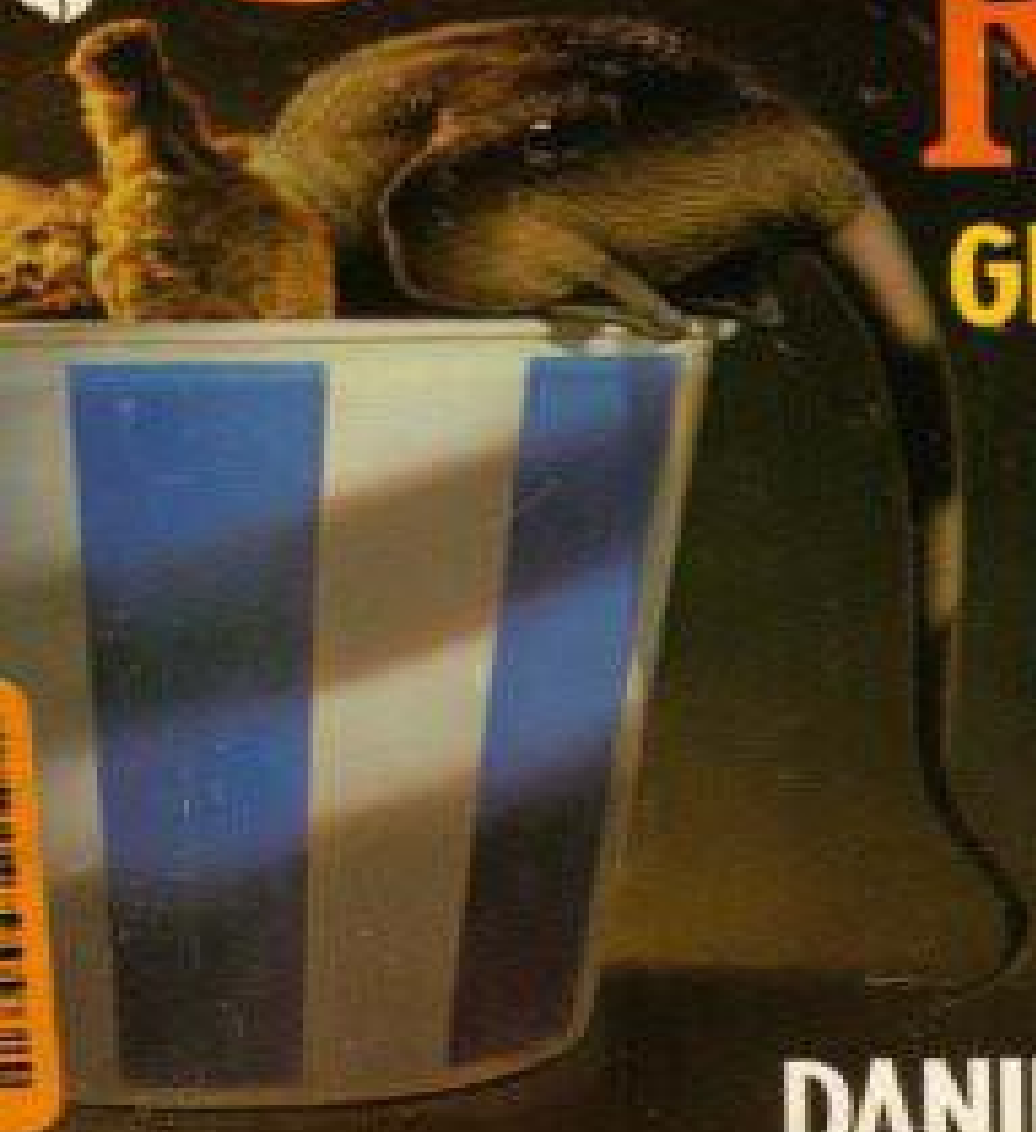
BEWARE OF THINGS THAT SCREAM IN THE NIGHT...
ONE OF THEM MIGHT BE YOU!

Southern Fried Rat & OTHER GRUESOME TALES



DANIEL COHEN

ARCHWAY PAPERBACK • 0-380-70993-5 • CANADA $4.50 • U.S. $3.50

Southern Fried Rat

& Other Gruesome Tales

DANIEL COHEN

illustrated by Peggy Brier

For the kids at B&B camp, Shohola, Pennsylvania

Introduction—Grossed Out

Oh, gross!

That may be your reaction to many of the tales that you read in this book. These are tales of dead mice in soft-drink bottles, and of girls who try to dry their hair in microwave ovens, with disastrous results. There are severed heads and severed hands. There are stories that are funny in a disgusting sort of way, and stories that are just plain gruesome, as well as some that are just plain silly.

But there is no way around it, most of the tales are pretty gross. Don't blame me. They are not my stories, they are yours. These are stories that people like you tell at slumber parties, or around campfires, or just during the course of an ordinary day.

Well, I guess that I have been known to tell them too. But they didn't begin with me. They didn't begin with you, either. In fact, no one knows where most of these stories started. The tales in this book are taken from folklore, most of them from a branch of folklore called urban legends, or urban belief tales. They are stories told by people who live in cities or suburbs today, and most of the tales are told to be believed. Indeed, many of those who tell the stories actually do believe them. Some of these tales have appeared in one form or another in newspapers, or have been broadcast on television or radio news programs.

Are they true? Probably not. There is not a credible shred of evidence that any of the tales in this book are really true, or have any substantial basis in truth. This does not keep them from being widely believed anyway.

Why do we persist in believing such revolting and sometimes silly tales? Why do we seem to want to believe them? Why do we even want to listen to such tales in the first place? I don't know, but we do.

You have been warned. There are some stomach-turning accounts ahead. A couple of the puns may make you groan in pain. I trust you will ignore the

warning and go right ahead and read them anyway. And when you are finished reading the tales, you will repeat your favorites, with your own horrible additions and revolting variations, to your friends. When your friend is about to bite into his or her fast-food delight, you will recount what you have learned in this book.

That, gentle reader, is the way that folklore spreads.

Southern Fried Rat

Jim and Karen had gone to the movies on Friday night. After the film was over, they both felt pretty hungry, so they decided to stop somewhere for a bite to eat. But where?

They discussed the decision for a while. Hamburgers? No—they always went for hamburgers after a movie.

How about pizza? Well, that would be nice, except the only decent pizza joint around was in a pretty rough neighborhood. Neither Jim nor Karen relished going into that neighborhood, particularly at night. You never could tell what might happen.

How about fried chicken? A brand-new outlet for a popular fried chicken chain had opened up iust a few blocks away. Why not, they decided, it would make a nice change from hamburgers.

They drove over to the new fried chicken place. It was jammed. It seemed as if everybody in town had the same idea.

"Let's go someplace else," said Jim. "It's so crowded that we'll never get a table."

Karen wanted to stay. "It smells so good, I really want chicken now. We can get a take-out order and eat it in the car."

Jim didn't much like the idea of eating in the car. That got the upholstery dirty. But Karen's desire for fried chicken was too powerful to resist. Reluctantly, he agreed that they would get a take-out order and eat in the car.

When they got to the counter, Jim ordered regular chicken and Karen ordered "extra crispy." Jim shuddered as he imagined the extra-crispy coating raining down on his clean upholstery.

Behind the counter uniformed attendants were working with amazing speed, packaging up the orders and passing them out to the throng of eager customers. Jim and Karen's order arrived in a matter of minutes, and they carried the box out to the car.

The place had been so crowded that Jim had been forced to park in the back of the lot, beyond the reach of the parking lot lights. It was pretty dark inside the car, but you didn't need lights to eat fried chicken.

Jim, worrying about the upholstery, ate in silence. Karen, who really was hungry, tore into her order and was loudly crunching away at the extra crispy.

"Hey, be careful about those crumbs," complained Jim.

"I am being careful," said Karen, talking with her mouth full.

After a few moments the crunching stopped, and Karen said,

"You know, there's something funny about this flied chicken. It doesn't taste right." But she kept on eating for a moment. And then she said, "It doesn't feel right either. Jim, you better switch on the light."

He did. Karen was correct; there was something funny about the fried chicken. Sticking out of the extra-crispy coating of the piece Karen had been eating was a three-inch tail. Somehow a rat had gotten in with the chicken pieces. It had been floured, fried up, and served to Karen. She had eaten half of it before she found out what it was.

As soon as she realized what she had been eating, Karen went into shock. Jim felt pretty sick too, but he managed to drive to the hospital, where Karen had her stomach pumped.

Karen's family threatened to sue. The fried chicken chain paid them a huge amount of money to keep quiet about what had happened, so the case never got to court, and it was never written up in the papers. Of course, the chicken people deny that it ever happened.

Karen's financial future is assured, but they say that now she won't eat anything that she doesn't cook herself.

_____

The day was hot and Billy had a long walk from school, carrying a heavy load of books. He was getting horribly thirsty, so when he passed the local convenience store he stopped in to get a soft drink.

He paid for bottle of cola and began to gulp it down. it tasted kind of funny, but since he was so very

thirsty, he kept right on drinking. His eyes were closed as he tipped the bottle up to drain the last few drops. Then he felt something kind of slimy slip down the neck of the bottle and bump up against his lips.

He held the bottle out where he could see it. There was something inside. It took Billy a moment before he could recognize what was in the bottle. It was the tail and rear legs of a partially decomposed mouse.

Billy dropped the bottle on the ground and began vomiting immediately. He was in the hospital for weeks. The doctors said he was suffemg from some kind of food poisoning.

Naturally, the cola bottling company said that there was no possible way the rodent piece could have gotten into the bottle, but they paid a big out-of-court settlement anyway, just to keep the incident out of the papers.

Not only doesn't Billy drink cola anymore, he has become a vegetarian.

_____

Have you ever wondered why the hamburgers you make at home never taste quite like the ones that you get at the fast-food place? It's not the special sauce or the onions or pickles or anything like that. It's the meat. The fast-food place supplements its hamburger meat with ground-up worms.

It figures, doesn't it? With all of those hamburger joints opening up all over the country, there just isn't enough beef to go around. So they have added the ground-up worm meat as a filler. Besides, it gives the hamburgers that special flavor. Naturally, they aren't going to tell the public about it.

The government knows all about the worms, but they won't say anything. The hamburger chain contributes a lot of money to politicians.

_____

One of the major fast-food hamburger chains advertises that the meat used in their hamburgers is freshly ground. That sounds great, but there can be problems. One night the local outlet of this chain was unusually busy and nearly ran out of fresh hamburger. In the back they were frantically grinding more. Things became so rushed that one of the fellows who was grinding the meat got his finger cut off and ground up in the machine. The management didn't want to lose any customers. They went ahead and served up that batch of hamburgers anyway.

_____

A few years ago there was a popular new candy that fizzed in your mouth. It was mostly colored sugar with carbon dioxide bubbles inside. When you put it in your mouth, the sugar melted and released the bubbles. The candy

didn't taste very good, but it did feel funny and was very popular. You don't see it around anymore. Want to know why?

Sometimes little kids wouldn't wait to let the candy dissolve in their mouths. They would just swallow a whole bunch of it. It would begin fizzing violently in their stomachs, and a couple of kids actually died became their stomachs had been all ripped up inside.

The manufacturers of the candy were a big, powerful company, so they managed to keep the stories out of the news. But they quietly took the candy off the market, and paid out a lot of money to parents.

These are just a few recent examples of the "horrible discovery" tales that regularly sweep the nation. Sometimes these tales are fed by actual stories of food contamination that appear in the news. Most often they are simply rumors based on fear and distrust, and on the apparently irresistible human urge to tell a really disgusting story.

The stories about the worm meat (which, incidentally, is more expensive than hamburger, in case you're interested) and the fizzing candy are totally false. That did not keep them from being widely believed anyway.

The tradition of telling such tales is an old one that long predates the existence of fast-food chains. For hundreds of years throughout America and Europe, people have heard about the diner in a restaurant who finds a gravy-covered mouse on his plate or slivers of glass in his mashed potatoes.

While there may be a grain of truth behind some of these tales, if they were all true we would either all have been poisoned long ago or the rodent population would be much smaller than it is today.

I Wanna Hold Your Hand

The old Boggs place was big, deserted, and very, very spooky. Like all big, deserted, and spooky-looking homes, this one had the reputation of being haunted. Or if not haunted, at least it had the reputation of being somehow or other evil and dangerous. People went out of their way to avoid it, and certainly no one would ever think of living there.

The house had been deserted for years. In fact, no one in town could remember when anyone had actually lived in the Boggs place. No one even knew why it was called the Boggs place. Perhaps people named Boggs had once lived there, but no one seemed to know for sure. If the Boggses once had lived there, they had cleared out a long time ago and had left no relatives behind. No one in town had ever met anyone named Boggs. Nor could anyone recall anything specifically horrible that was ever supposed to have happened at the home.

Inevitably, there were plenty of rumors. Some said there had been a murder there once, and that the house was haunted by the ghost of the murdered woman, or by the ghost of her murderer, depending on who you asked. Others said that a weird old man had once lived in the

house all alone. People didn't see him very often, and one day when no one had seen him for a very long time, a group of men went up to the house and found the old man hanging from a beam in an upstairs bedroom. The body had been hanging there so long that the flesh had practically rotted away. According to this version, it's the old man's ghost that haunts the house.

Others say that it was an old woman who lived up in the house all alone, and that she used to practice some sort of black magic. One night, goes this version of the story, there were terrible screams heard coming from the house. People saw a blinding flash of light, and then everything was silent. The next morning when the sheriff went up to investigate, the house was empty. The only clue to what might have happened to the old woman was a suspicious-looking pile of ashes. In this version of the story, the old woman had been involved in some sort of magical ceremony that went wrong, and

she was burned by flames from the underworld. The house, they say, is still troubled by the demons she let loose that night.

The final version of the tale says that the troubles of the Boggs place began more recently—long after the house was abandoned, by Boggs or any other legitimate owners. This version holds that a homicidal maniac who escaped from a nearby mental institution took up residence in the house, and that he lives there still, making horrible noises and doing strange things in order to frighten away those who might want to disturb his hiding place.

No one has ever actually seen anything, be it ghost, demon, or maniac, at the house. They have just heard about others who have seen strange figures. Occasionally people would report seeing a light in the house. Just reflected sunlight, say the skeptics. Others report hearing strange noises coming from the empty house, or just getting a weird feeling whenever they get near it. Skeptics scoff at such stories, but they don't go near the house, either.

So the Boggs place, which stands starkly alone at the top of a hill in the midst of what was once a large lawn, but is now overgrown with waist-high weeds, is rarely troubled by visitors. Still, there are always a few brave or foolhardy souls for whom something like the Boggs place holds an irresistible, even a fatal, attraction.

Such a pair were Chris and Lisa. They weren't local—the locals were scared off long ago. They were counselors at a summer camp nearby. They had come up from the city, and they viewed the town with the same sort of amused contempt that most city people showed for it. When they heard about the tales surrounding the Boggs place, they decided that they were going to go up and explore it. No haunted house was going to scare them—they faced the subway every day.

So one evening late in August, Chris and Lisa could be found making their way through the high weeds up to the front porch of the Boggs place. It had to be evening, for there was no challenge in visiting a haunted house in the middle of the day. And of course the weather had to be threatening. A summer thunderstorm was about to break at any moment. What is a haunted house without thunder and lightning and the wind howling outside?

Chris and Lisa got to the front door just as the first few drops of rain began to fall. The door was open. The lock had long since rusted.

Chris switched on his flashlight, and they began looking around. The house was not completely empty of furniture as they thought it might be. One room contained an easy chair and several old wicker rocking chairs.

Everything in the place was covered by a thick layer of dust. When Chris flashed the light around the rooms, Lisa pointed out that in some places the dust seemed to be disturbed, as if by footprints.

"Mice," said Chris, confidently. "Or squirrels."

As they worked their way from room to room, a creaking sound was heard coming from one of the upper stories.

"That sounds like footsteps," said Lisa, in a hushed and frightened voice.

"Mice," said Chris, "or squirrels." But he was no longer so confident, because the noises really did sound like footsteps.

"Let's get out of here," said Lisa. "I think we've explored enough."

Chris eagerly agreed, and they made their way back through the room with the chairs and toward the front door. The storm had begun in earnest now, and there was a flash of lightning followed by a tremendous clap of thunder. In the flash, both Chris and Lisa saw, or

thought they saw, a form standing in the waist-high weeds in the front of the house. There was another flash. The form was still there but it had moved.

"Someone's out there," said Lisa, "or something."

"If we get out in those weeds," said Chris, "whatever it is can sneak right up on us. We'd never know until it was too late. I think we'll be safer here in the house until it's light."

Spending the night in that house was not a pleasant prospect, but Lisa saw the wisdom of the suggestion. So they went back to the room with the

chairs. Lisa sat down in the armchair, and Chris pulled one of the wicker rockers over next to it.

The flashlight, which had been growing weaker by the minute, finally gave out entirely, and Chris and Lisa sat there in total darkness.

"I'm scared," said Lisa.

"So am I," said Chris.

"Hold my hand, maybe we'll feel better."

Chris reached over and grasped Lisa's hand and gave it a squeeze. It made them both feel better, momentarily. There was nothing that either one of them could do or say. They just sat there holding hands in the darkness, waiting for morning to come. Lisa could hear Chris rocking back and forth, and every once in a while he gave her hand a little squeeze.

Lisa dozed off for a moment, but when she awoke she was still holding Chris's hand, and she could still hear his rocking chair squeaking. But slowly she became conscious of the fact that something was different, something had changed. It took a while to realize what had happened or not

happened—Chris had not squeezed her hand for some time. Perhaps he was asleep. But no, she could still hear the rhythmic squeaking of the rocking chair. She wanted to call out to Chris, but terror had robbed her of her voice.

Finally a smear of grayish light could be seen through the window. It was dawn. And as the room in which Lisa sat was illuminated, she saw what had happened.

She was still holding Chris's hand—just his hand. The rest of him was hanging from a beam in the ceiling. And rocking rhythmically in a chair across the room was a huge, wild-looking man, dressed in rags and clutching an enormous, bloody knife.

The Secondhand

Evening Gown

Sally had never been the most popular girl in school.

It wasn't her looks. She was really quite pretty. It wasn't her personality. She was bright, cheerful, friendly, and interesting. Sally's problem was money. She didn't have any, and most of the other girls in the school did. While other girls wore Calvins, Sally had to get along with jeans from Sears. Her sweaters had been worn and washed so many times that they lost whatever shape they may have had in the first place. They certainly didn't do anything for Sally's shape. And her coat, as someone rather cruelly pointed out to her, looked like it belonged in the ancient-history museum.

During the summer, when most of the other girls and most of the boys in the school were off at the seashore or some other vacation spot, Sally could be found behind the counter at the local junk-food joint. The hours were long, the work was hard, and the pay was terrible, but she needed whatever she could get.

Sally's father had walked out on the family when she was six, leaving her mother as the sole support for three small children. Her mother had worked at a series of low-paying jobs in order to hold the family together, which she did—but just barely. In short, Sally was poor.

Sally wasn't in the top clique in school, or the next to the top clique, or any clique at all. She just didn't have the time. When she wasn't taking care of her younger brother and sister or cooking and cleaning at home, she was out working somewhere or doing her schoolwork. Since she was naturally quiet, the most popular kids in school barely knew she existed.

Therefore it was a major shock to Sally and to every other girl in the school when Davey Phillips asked her to go to the prom. Davey was not only the best-looking boy in the senior class, he was also the best basketball player,

he had the flashiest car, and he had the reputation of being a pretty nice guy, too.

Sally knew who he was. They had been in some classes together, and they had talked from time to time. But she had no idea that he liked her, or that he had ever even really noticed her. He had, however, and when he went over a list of possible dates for the prom, they all seemed vapid or dumpy when compared to Sally. He knew all about the hard life she had led, and he admired her. Although there was a good deal of nasty whispering when word of whom he had asked got out, Davey was the top dog of the top clique, and no one would dare tell him what to do.

Sally was overjoyed at the invitation. She was also

frightened and almost desperate because she didn't have anything to wear. At the prom all of the other girls would have gorgeous new evening dresses. Sally not only didn't have a new dress, she didn't have any dress at all.

Now in stories, a fairy godmother appears and turns the poor girl's rags into a beautiful dress. Or the girl's clever mother turns the kitchen curtains into something that would not look out of place on the pages of *Vogue*. This is not a story. There are no fairy godmothers, and Sally's mother couldn't even do a hem. Neither could Sally.

"Maybe we could get a secondhand dress cheap down at the pawnshop," said Sally's mother.

Sally wasn't too proud to wear a secondhand gown. Besides, there was no other alternative. So she and her mother went down to the pawnshop, and there it was: a beautiful satin evening gown in the most delicate shade of pale blue. It was Sally's favorite color. She hardly dared hope that the dress would fit, but it did—perfectly. And the price was just a few dollars.

When Sally and Davey arrived at the prom, the envious whispers grew louder and more persistent than ever. She looked truly beautiful in her pale blue evening gown. A lot of the other boys began to notice Sally for the first time. They all wanted to dance with her. But Davey chased them all away. He wanted every dance for himself.

It was a magical evening. Sally danced and danced, until she began to feel a little dizzy. She tried to shake off the feeling, for she didn't want anything to spoil her evening. But her dizziness grew worse, and she got a headache and a feeling of nausea too.

"Sally, what's the matter? You look as if you feel sick," said Davey.

"Yes, I do," she answered. "I think you had better take me home."

On the drive home, Sally was feeling worse by the minute, and Davey was really getting concerned. But SaUy's mother wasn't worried at all. "It's just the excitemerit," she said. "She was looking forward to this evening so much, she became overexcited. That's how girls are. I remember I was the same way when I was her age. It's a shame to ruin such a lovely evening, but I'm sure there will be others."

Davey agreed that there would be.

Sally's mother took her upstairs, put her to bed, and told her she would feel much better after a good night's rest. But when her mother went to awaken her in the morning, she found that Sally didn't feel anything, beeause Sally was dead.

At first the doctors couldn't figure out what had killed her. Chemical tests showed that she had a high content of embalming fluid in her blood, and that's what did it. Heavy traces of the fluid were found on the pale blue satin dress she had worn. The doctors speculated that the fatal fluid had entered Sally's body when she perspired while dancing.

The pawnbroker was questioned, and he finally admitted that he had received the dress from an undertaker's assistant. It turned out this assistant had been regularly stealing clothes from corpses before they were buried and pawning them at this particular shop. This was the first time any of the clothes had caused a problem.

Stories of poisoned garments go back to the days of the ancient Greeks.

A Warning

Dr. Cartwright was just getting ready to leave his office after a long day of seeing patients when his nurse in the outer office buzzed him on the intercom.

"Doctor," she said, "there is a woman out here who insists on seeing you."

"Tell her to come back in the morning. Office hours are over for the day."

"I've told her that already, but she won't go away. She says it's an emergency. She's very upset. I think you had better see her."

The doctor sighed and began thinking about the ingratitude of patients who didn't think doctors had a right to a personal life. But he was a doctor. It was his job to heal and comfort the sick. Even if it was late, one more patient . . . "All right. Send her in," he said. "And you can go for the evening. I'll lock up."

A moment later a middle-aged woman in a dark and rather old-fashioned dress entered the room. She looked pale and ill, clearly in need of medical attention.

"What seems to be the trouble, Mrs.—Uh, I don't know your name."

The woman ignored that. "It's not for me that I have come," she said. "You have to see someone else."

"Is the person here now?" said the doctor.

"No, but he doesn't live very far from here."

Dr. Cartwright groaned. Worse, and worse, he thought. Not only does this strange woman barge in after hours. Now she wants to take me somewhere else.

"I'm very sorry," he said. "I don't make house calls. If this person is very ill, he will have to call his regular doctor or go to the hospital emergency ward."

The woman stared directly at him. "There's no time for that. If you don't go at once, he will die. It may be too late already. You are the closest doctor. Please, you must come!"

The woman's voice was compelling. Her whole body radiated a sense of urgency. Dr. Cartwright was unable to resist. "All right, if it's not far, take me there."

"It's not far." She then gave the doctor an address, which indeed was only a block away.

"Give me a moment, and I'll get a few things together in case they are needed."

When the doctor turned around, the woman was gone. That woman is crazy, he thought. First she barges in on me. Then she disappears. I should forget the whole thing. Yet there was something completely convincing about the woman's sense of urgency and concern. Against his better judgment, Dr. Cartwright decided that he would visit the address she had given.

The address was that of a small house, one that Dr. Cartwright had doubtless passed hundreds of times on his way to his office but had never really noticed before. Feeling rather foolish, he went up to the front door and rang the bell.

The door was answered by a young man.

"I'm Dr. Cartwright. My office is in the neighborhood. I've been told that there is someone in this house in need of immediate medical attention."

The young man looked puzzled. "Impossible," he said. "I live here alone, and I feel fine. Is this some sort of joke? Who told you to come here."

"It was a woman," said Dr. Cartwright. "She was in her mid-fifties and she looked like, she looked like, well . . . She looked just like that." The doctor's eye had been caught by a photograph of a woman hanging in the hall near the door where he stood. "That's her. That's the woman who just came to my office and told me that there is someone in the house who was dying and needed a doctor at once."

Instantly all of the color drained from the young man's face. "That's a picture of my mother," he said. "She has been dead for ten years."

Within a few hours the young man was stricken, and he died that very night. There was nothing the doctors could do for him.

Variations of this tale go back at least one hundred years. It is usually not told as a ghost story, that is, as a piece of fiction, but as a true story. Folklorist Jan Harold Brunvand cites a newspaper article that appeared in a December 16, 1890, edition of a Russian newspaper, the Citizen *of Saint Petersburg. It is about a young man who is visited by a priest. The priest has been told by a woman that he must go and administer the sacraments to a sick man in the apartment. The young man denies that he is sick, but the priest recognizes the woman who has visited him from a painting on the wall.*

"That is the portrait of my dead mother," says the young man. He takes the sacraments, and that evening he is dead. The story is reported as one that is "going about town" and is "worthy of attention."

A very similar tale was also collected in the 1920s by the British Society for Psychical Research. It too was supposed to be true.

Professor Brunvand points out that this story has many similarities to the phantom hitchhiker legend—the most popular and widespread of all modern American ghost legends.

Sometimes in the phantom hitchhiker story, the person who has picked up the hitchhiker sees a photograph and identifies the girl in the photo as the one he picked up. The response is always something like this:

"That's a picture of my daughter. She was killed ten years ago, at the very spot that you picked up the hitchhiker."

Oven Ready

Mr. and Mrs. Collins received a last-minute invitation to a very important cocktail party at the country club. It was the sort of invitation they had been hoping to get for more than two years, and now that it had arrived, even at the last moment, they were thrilled. Naturally they wouldn't be able to take their six-month-old son, Christopher, to the party, and they needed a baby-sitter badly.

Lucy Collins quickly called her regular baby-sitter but found the girl already had a date that evening. Her second-choice baby-sitter had another job that evening; so did the third. Mrs. Collins was getting a bit frantic. She was afraid that she would have to miss the cocktail party after all, an enormous disappointment since she had waited so long and wished so hard for the invitation.

She called her regular baby-sitter back to plead with the girl to break her date and do her a favor "just this once." The girl's date was every bit as important to her as the cocktail party was to Mrs. Collins, and she refused. Still, the girl felt very sorry for her. Mrs. Collins was pleading and asking her if she knew of anyone, anyone at all, who was free that evening to baby-sit for Christopher.

The girl thought for a moment. She knew these last-minute jobs were always hard to arrange, particularly on a Saturday night. Mentally she ticked off a list of names, discarding first this one and then that one because she knew they would be busy. Then she remembered Carrie Barker. Sure, Carrie was a little weird, a little mixed up. But basically she was a good kid, eager to please, and she would probably welcome the job. She didn't get many sitting jobs because most parents didn't like her looks.

"Well, if you are really desperate," the girl said, "there's Carrie Barker. She doesn't live too far away. I'll give you her phone number."

Mrs. Collins was deeply grateful for the information and called Carrie Barker immediately. On the phone Carrie sounded strange and a bit out of

touch. But she was perfectly willing to baby-sit and said she would come right over.

By the time Mrs. Collins made the arrangements on the phone, Mr. Collins was pacing up and down anxiously looking at his watch. It was all right to be a little late to a cocktail party, but if you were too late, then everyone would notice, and that wasn't a good idea. When the doorbell rang, signaling the arrival of the sitter, he was very much relieved. "Thank God, she's finally here," he said.

It was easy to see why Carrie Barker had trouble getting baby-sitting jobs. Her clothes were strange and her hair was wildly unkempt. Most unsettling and disturbing was the distant, almost vacant, look in her eyes.

As Mrs. Collins showed Carrie around the house, the baby's room, the kitchen, and the bathroom, the girl moved almost like a sleepwalker. When she presented Carrie with a piece of paper on which had been written a name and number where they could be reached in case of emergency, the girl didn't even glance at it but crumpled it and pushed it into the pocket of her jeans.

Carrie Barker's appearance and actions were so strange that Mrs. Collins toyed with the idea of making up some excuse, paying the girl off, and then just staying home herself. Mr. and Mrs. Collins had a heated whispered conversation about this. Mr. Collins finally convinced his wife that there was nothing really wrong with the new sitter. "It's just the way the kids are today." And so with a considerable feeling of unease hanging over her, Mrs. Collins was persuaded to go to the party, leaving her baby behind with the sitter.

The feeling of doom grew on Mrs. Collins as the evening wore on. While others walked about chatting and laughing, Mrs. Collins stood grimly in a corner, hardly talking to anyone. "At least try to look like you're having a good time," muttered her husband.

It was no use. She was much too anxious to enjoy herself, or even to pretend to. Mrs. Collins found a phone and called her home.

"Hello." The voice sounded hollow, but it was definitely Carrie Barker's.

"Oh hello, Carrie. I'm just calling to see if everything is all right."

"Oh sure, Mrs. Collins. I've made dinner for when you get home. The turkey's in the oven."

"That's nice, dear. Thank you so much."

It was only after she hung up that the shock hit Mrs. Collins. Turkey, what turkey? There was no turkey in the house.

She rushed up to her husband and said, "We've got to go home at once. Something terrible may have happened."

He tried to calm her, but she was not to be put off this time. Rather than have his wife make a scene, Mr. Collins made some hasty excuses and they left. He was angry, she was frightened; they didn't talk much while driving home.

When they arrived they were greeted by the smell of cooking. The dining room table was set with the family's best china and crystal. The lights had been turned out and there were candles on the table.

Carrie was standing in the kitchen. "Turkey's almost ready," she said. "See." She opened the oven door, revealing the baby inside.

It seems that the girl had been taking drugs, and her brain had been so messed up that she had mistaken the baby for a turkey.

_____

Debbie had just washed her hair in preparation for going out on a big date. She plugged in her hair drier, flipped the on switch, and nothing happened. It was broken.

She looked at her watch. Roger would be picking her up in fifteen minutes. Unlike some boys, he was always on time, and hated to be kept waiting. And there she would be, looking like a drowned rat. Something had to be done.

She went into the kitchen and spied the family's new microwave oven. She knew that with it her mother could cook a meal in five minutes, so surely it would dry her hair in less than a minute. Debbie stuck her head in the microwave oven, reached over, and turned on the switch.

Roger found her with her head still in the oven. She looked pretty horrible, and of course she was dead. Debbie didn't know that microwave ovens don't work like ordinary ovens. They cook from the inside. The oven had boiled her brains in twenty seconds.

The story of the baby-sitter who cooks her charge swept the country during the !ate 1960s and early 1970s. Widely believed, it was also unique among tales of this sort, for parents told it to their children. It was used as a cautionary tale about the sort of horrible things that could happen to kids who took drugs. The story went along with the tales of drug-induced

attempts to fly out of tall buildings and of young drug takers who had been blinded by staring at the sun.

A popular variation of the microwave oven story tells of how a person has washed his cat or dog and then puts it into the microwave oven to dry. When he returns a few minutes later, he finds the animal fully cooked—or in some variations the animal has exploded. It is very similar to older tales of dogs, cats, or children that wind up in washing machines, driers, or trash compactors. And don t forget Hansel and Gretel. The old witch was

trying to shove those kids into the oven.

Finger Tales

The Alexander hotel had a lot of trouble with room 1313. Aside from its unfortunate number, the room really was haunted. The management tried to avoid renting the room, because the guests never stayed through the night.

But there was a convention in town, and every hotel room for miles around was booked. So when a tired-looking salesman appeared at the desk begging for a room, the clerk took pity on him and gave him the key to room 1313.

"I warn you," said the clerk. "It's haunted."

"I'm not afraid of ghosts," said the salesman.

The salesman was exhausted from traveling. He went directly to his room and started to unpack. When he opened the closet a ghost came out, and it was a particularly horrible ghost too. It waved its bleeding hands in the air and shouted, "Bloody fingers! Bloody fingers!"

The salesman decided that he wasn't so tired after all, and besides he really was afraid of ghosts, so he left immediately.

Next came a soldier. He was on his way home for a leave but had missed his plane connection and couldn't get another flight until the following morning.

"I'm afraid the only room we have is haunted, sir," said the clerk.

"I've fought in three wars," said the soldier. "I've seen men die all around me. I don't believe in ghosts."

So he went up to the room. Once again the ghost came out of the closet and waved its hands in the air and moaned, "Bloody fingers. Bloody fingers."

The soldier decided he would sleep in the airport.

It got to be very late, and the clerk didn't expect any more guests. One showed up though. He had long shaggy hair and a scraggly beard. He wore torn Levis and carried a battered guitar case. The clerk didn't much like his looks. So he gave him the haunted room.

The fellow ambled into the room, sat down on the bed, took out his guitar, and began to play softly.

The ghost popped out of the closet and, waving his crimson and dripping hands in the air, moaned, "Bloody fingers. Bloody fingers."

The man kept right on strumming and humming, not paying the slightest attention to the ghost.

"Bloody fingers. Bloody fingers," meaned the ghost more loud!y.

The guitar player barely looked up.

"Bloody fingers! Bloody fingers!" shrieked the ghost.

The guitar player stopped, looked over at the ghost, and very slowly said, "Need a Band-Aid, man?"

_____

Once there was a large and prosperous kingdom ruled by a wise and powerful king. Then disaster struck in the form of a strange plague, which caused people to sicken and die horribly within a few weeks. The population of the kingdom was being decimated. All the physicians in the land were called to the palace, but none of them had any idea of what to do about this new disease.

The oldest of the physicians said that he had once heard that many years ago, when his grandfather was a boy, the kingdom had been struck by just such a mysterious sickness. The pestilence had been ended with a magic potion prepared by an old sorceress. It was said that she was still alive, but her home was in the middle of the Dark Forest.

"The Dark Forest!" everyone gasped. They all knew that the Dark Forest was the most dangerous place in the kingdom. Perhaps the most dangerous place in the entire world, for in the Dark Forest lived the Yellow Fingers, which grabbed a traveler and squeezed him to death. But no one could come up with another plan to save the kingdom, so it was decided that someone had to defy the Yellow Fingers and find the ancient sorceress in the middle of the Dark Forest.

The king called his bravest knight and explained the situation. Without hesitation, the brave knight marched off into the forest and was never heard from again.

The king then called his second bravest knight. This knight hesitated for a moment before going into the fatal forest. But once he went in, he never came out.

So the king called his third bravest knight, who took a bit more persuading. And his fourth, and fifth, and so on. None of them ever returned from the forest. Finally the remaining knights, who were not very brave at all, went into hiding.

The king was reduced to a state of despair. Then one of the king's young pages came to him and offered to go into the Dark Forest and get the marc potion from the old sorceress.

The king was touched by the boy's foolish bravery, but he said, "Don't you realize that the Dark Forest is the home of the Yellow Fingers, and that many of my bravest knights have perished there?"

The boy said that he knew all about it, but he was still quite sure that he would be able to accomplish his mission. In the end the king reluctantly agreed to let the page go. He was so desperate that he didn't know what else to do.

The boy walked off into the Dark Forest, and the king confidently expected never to see him again. Therefore the king was not merely surprised but very nearly hysterical with joy when, two days later, the page came walking

out of the Dark Forest clutching the formula for the magic potion that would save the kingdom.

"How did you do it?" cried the king.

The page just smiled, and said, "From now on let your pages do the walking through the Yellow Fingers."

A Piece of Wire

No one could be found to dispute the observation that Buddy Edwards was a bully. Least of all Buddy Edwards. He was quite proud of his notorious reputation. For as long as anyone could remember, he had been a bully. He had always been big for his age, and by the time he was in seventh grade he was almost six feet tall and weighed over 180 pounds.

In school he was a bully, stealing lunch money from his smaller and weaker schoolmates and making them do his homework. The teachers all knew what was going on, but they were afraid of him too. Even his parents were afraid of him. Buddy Edwards was one mean and nasty kid.

He never outgrew his role as school bully. At the age of twenty-three he was still pushing around those who were smaller and weaker than he was. That meant he was pushing practically everyone around. Buddy was no mental heavyweight, but he was smart enough to know how to keep out of real trouble. He didn't commit any big crimes, the kind that might get him a couple of years in the slammer. He was afraid of that. Usually he stayed on the right side of the law—barely, but enough to keep him out of jail. He didn't run with any tough gangs either. Down deep he was afraid of them too. Buddy was always scared when he thought he might be put in a position where someone would be able to push him around. He was not really a criminal, he was a bully. He wanted to dominate others, and like most bullies he was basically a coward.

When he walked, Buddy would somehow take up the whole sidewalk, forcing people into the gutter or up against the buildings. When he came into a restaurant or bar, he took people's favorite booths, blew smoke in their faces, insulted their girlfriends. But his principal instrument of aggression was his motorcycle.

Buddy owned a huge motorcycle. He had adjusted it so that it made more noise than a jet plane at takeoff. It was the loudest motorcycle anyone had ever heard, and Buddy loved it. He would roar up and down the quiet streets at midnight and lights would go on all over town. The police were

often called, but nobody was ever willing to sign a complaint against Buddy. They were all afraid he would "get them" later. So he always went free.

He was a real menace to bike riders, even little kids on bikes. He would roar past, nearly sideswiping them, causing heaven knows how many scraped knees and bent wheels as bicycles went out of control and crashed to avoid him. He would sometimes challenge cars—if he knew the drivers—by suddenly cutting in front of them. More than one car wound up in a ditch or crumpled a fender around a pole trying to avoid Buddy Edwards and his motorcycle. And Buddy would ride by again, laughing at the unfortunate driver and making obscene gestures. There were some who wished that they hadn't swerved to avoid him. But Buddy knew, instinctively, that they always would. They didn't have the guts to hit him, and he always took advantage of that certain knowledge.

Charlie Sebring and Roger Platt had, to their misfortune, known Buddy Edwards for many years. Buddy had bullied and terrorized them through school, just the other day he had forced Charlie's car off the road with his motorcycle. It took a tow truck to get Charlie's car out of the ditch. Buddy had watched and laughed.

Charlie was still seething, not merely from his most recent humiliation but from years of torment at the hands of the bully. He was talking in dead earnest to Roger. Both had already consumed a few drinks.

"That guy's no joke anymore," Charlie said "He's a deadly menace. I could have been killed being run off the road like that. One day he really is going to kili someone. Something has to be done about him before he does."

"Sure, sure," said Ralph. He had heard it all before. He had said it all before. "Who's going to do anything? You or me? Even if he gets arrested, it'll be a few weeks in jail and then he's back out on the street, and after us. There's nothing we can do about it There never has been, and there never will be."

"Yes there is," said Charlie. "I've got a plan. It's something I've been thinking about for a couple of days now. We can fix him good, and he'll

never know who did it."

Suddenly Ralph was interested. Fixing Buddy Edwards good was something that he had wanted to do for a long, long time. Particularly if Buddy never knew who "fixed him." "Okay, what's your plan?"

"Now, you know where he lives, down by Four Corners. In order to get home he comes down Miller's Hill and over the Black Creek bridge. He comes that way every night. Now, lets say somebody strung a piece of wire across the end of the bridge, just about chest high. When he came to the bridge he would hit the wire and it would knock him right off his motorcycie. Maybe the motorcycle would even be wrecked, and then we wouldn't have to worry about it anymore."

Ralph thought for a moment. "Sounds dangerous. I mean he could be pretty badly hurt, getting knocked off his motorcycle like that."

"Guys like Buddy are too tough to get badly hurt. Besides, does he ever worry about someone getting hurt when he forces them off the road? I could have been killed the other day. He'll just have to take his chances."

"The police would suspect us of stringing up the wire," said Ralph.

"Sure they would. They would suspect half the people in town. And the police don't like Buddy any better than we do. Do you think they would waste a lot of time trying to find out who did something to him?"

Ralph hesitated for a moment, but the memory of a thousand injuries at the hands of that bully, plus the foolhardy courage brought on by a few drinks, confirmed his decision. "When do we do it?"

"Now," said Charlie. "Tonight. I have a piece of wire in my car."

They drove to the vicinity of the Black Creek bridge and parked about half a mile away. They decided to string the wire up where Buddy would be leaving the bridge. They figured that as he crossed the bridge he would have to slow down, and thus he would not slam into the wire at a high speed. "We want to scare him, not kill him," said Ralph.

After putting up the wire, the two men hid in a clump of bushes and waited. It wasn't long before they heard the familiar roar of Buddy Edwards's motorcycle coming over Miller's Hill. They could see the headlight as it reached the crest of the hill and started down toward the bridge.

"He's going awful fast," said Ralph. "He better slow down over the bridge."

But he didn't; perhaps he had been drinking, perhaps he always went too fast. Buddy Edwards hit the wire at a tremendous speed. They saw the motorcycle continue straight forward, while Buddy's body was flung backwards. And they feared they saw something else.

"Oh my God," gasped Ralph.

The motorcycle crashed into a tree not far from where the two men were hidden. Buddy's body had been thrown onto the bridge. At least most of it had.

When police investigated the scene they found Buddy's head was missing. The wire had been strung just a bit too high and instead of catching Buddy in the chest, it got him in the neck, and the impact sliced his head right off.

The police assumed that the head had been thrown into the creek and washed away. It was never found.

This tale and others like it are often used to explain "spook lights"—strange and unexplainable lights that are seen on some local hill or bridge, The light is said to be the headlight of the ghost motorcycle, which must return again and again to the scene of the accident.

How Embarrassing!

On the morning of his fortieth birthday, Stan Crane arose feeling pretty depressed. As comedian Jack Benny once observed, thirty-nine is a funny age, forty isn't. It's all downhill from here, thought Stan.

As he washed and shaved he cheered up a bit. His wife and kids would be waiting for him downstairs. They would probably have a birthday present for him and start singing "Happy Birthday," and that would make him feel much better about being forty.

When Stan got downstairs, his family barely acknowledged his presence. His wife was reading her newspaper. His kids were wolfing down their food because they were late for school as usual. Nobody said a word to him. They've all forgotten, thought Stan. He left for work that morning feeling more depressed than ever because his family took him for granted and barely noticed him anymore. They just don't care, he thought.

At work things were different. Stan's pretty young secretary greeted him with a big smile and a cheery, "Happy Birthday, boss." She brought him coffee and a doughnut, and was exceptionally friendly all morning. That really made Stan feel better.

As noon approached, the secretary suggested that the two of them might have lunch together to celebrate his birthday. Stan jumped at the suggestion, instead of going to the usual place for a sandwich, Stan decided that they should go to a really nice restaurant and have a good lunch. "After all, it is my birthday," he said.

So at noon Stan locked up the office, and he and his secretary went to one of the fanciest restaurants in town. They had a couple of drinks before eating, and some wine with their food. When lunch was over, Stan was feeling very mellow.

As Stan and his secretary were driving back to the office, she said that since they had to go past her apartment building, they might stop off there for

another drink. Once again Stan jumped at the suggestion.

Up in the apartment she fixed a couple of drinks, and then she excused herself, saying that she wanted to slip into something more comfortable. When she was out of the room Stan thought, By God, I'm not so old after all. I've still got the old sex appeal. He began taking off his clothes.

Then he heard his secretary's voice from behind the bedroom door. "Are you ready?"

"You bet I am!" shouted Stan.

The bedroom door was flung open, and there stood the secretary holding a big birthday cake. Behind her were Stan's wife and children. "Surprise, surprisei" they all yelled. It sure was a surprise, because by that time Stan was wearing nothing but his socks.

_____

Mrs. Lowery was in the basement doing the wash. Her hair was up in rollers, and the overhead pipes were leaking. Looking around for something to protect her hair, she spotted her son's football helmet and put it on.

As she was putting the clothes in the machine, she noticed that the housedress she was wearing was badly soiled. Impulsively she took it off and put it in with the other dirty clothes.

There she stood wearing nothing but a football helmet when she heard someone cough. She turned around to see a man staring at her. It was the plumber her husband had called to fix the leaky pipes.

"I hope your team wins, lady," said the plumber.

_____

David had become engaged to a wonderful girl whom he met in college. He didn't know her family, but from what she told him they were pretty straitlaced people. Naturally, when he was invited to dinner at their house

for the first time he was very nervous and wanted desperately to make a good impression.

Dinner seemed to be going fairly well, but about halfway through David glanced down and saw to his horror that his fly was unzipped. No one else had noticed, so very carefully and slowly, without looking down again, David managed to zip it up. What he didn't notice was that he had snagged the edge of tile tablecloth in the zipper. When dinner was over and he got up to walk away from the table, he pulled the tablecloth and sent all the dishes crashing to the floor.

_____

Mrs. Gardner came home from the grocery store and saw her husband working under the car. All that was visible were his legs and the lower part of his torso. She laughed and reached down and unzipped his fly. She was still laughing to herself as she walked into the house, but her laughter turned to shock when she saw her husband sitting in front of the television.

"Who's out under the car?" she cried.

"Oh, that's Harry from the garage. I couldn't figure out what was wrong with the car, so he said he'd come over and take a look."

Then Mrs. Gardner told her husband what she had done, and they both went outside to see what Harry's reaction had been. They found him still under the car, unconscious, with a huge gash in his head.

He had been so surprised by what had happened that he tried to sit up and banged his head.

_____

Grant and Madene Berger had been on a two-week camping trip. They had been having such a good time that they had delayed their return to the last possible moment, and Grant had to drive all night. By morning he was exhausted. They still had a long way to go and couldn't stop. Grant asked

Madene to take over the driving while he went into the back of the camper to take a nap.

Grant knew that it was illegal for anyone to ride in the back of a moving camper. He also knew that Marlene was not a very experienced driver with this vehicle. So he told her to drive slowly and not make any stops if she could help it.

Grant got into the back of the camper for his nap. It was hot in the camper so he stripped down to his shorts. Still he was not able to sleep soundly. Every bump woke him up. He was worried that Mariene would be flagged down by the police. Then he felt the vehicle come to a dead stop. He got up, opened the door, and looked out to see what had happened.

Marlone had merely stopped for a light, and when the light turned green she started up again, but since she did not shift gears smoothly the vehicle started with a lurch, which knocked Grant right out of the door onto the road.

There he stood in his shorts, watching his camper disappear down the highway. A few moments later the police arrived.

How am I going to explain this one? Grant thought.

———————

Willis owned a camper trailer, but he never drove it farther than the family campsite, about thirty miles from his home. The large spare gas tank that came with the trailer was useless to him. But Willis was a frugal fellow who hated to see anything go to waste, so he converted the spare gas tank to a holding tank for the camper toilet.

He was asleep in the camper one night when he thought he heard some strange noises outside. In his semiconscious condition Willis decided that the noise was nothing more than a marauding raccoon, and so he went back to sleep.

The next morning when Willis stepped out of his camper, he found that the noise had not been made by a raccoon. Someone had been trying to siphon gas out of his spare tank. There on the ground lay a siphon hose abandoned by the would-be thief, plus unmistakable evidence that after trying to suck the "gas" out of the spare tank, the thief had been very, very ill.

———————

Dr. Gray had seen a lot of strange injuries in his time, but nothing quite like the one suffered by the patient who now lay before him on a table in the emergency room.

"How did it happen?" asked the doctor.

The patient, who obviously was in great pain, merely groaned and turned his head away.

"How did it happen?" repeated the doctor. "You can tell me."

"Well," said the man. "My wife saw a spider in the toilet bowl. She's deathly afraid of spiders, so she tried to kill it with her hair spray. She sprayed the toilet bowl full of the stuff.

"I didn't know anything about that and a couple of minutes later i went into the bathroom. I was just sitting there smoking a cigarette, and I dropped the lighted butt into the bowl. It exploded and blew me halfway across the room."

All of these embarrassing tales and scores more like them are funny. They make you laugh. But they are not jokes—that is, they are not obvious fiction. They are almost always told as true stories, and they are widely believed, even by people who should know better. Accounts of a man in his shorts found wandering around on the highway have frequently appeared in newspapers, and the story of the nude surprise party once popped up in Ann Landers's column.

The Wendango

John Reynolds and Ross McRaye from Philadelphia were going on a long-planned camping and hunting trip to western Canada. For two weeks they would get off into the wilds, far, far away from civilization. They were going to a place where they didn't have to worry about running into a lot of other campers or hunters.

John had heard about a little town on the edge of the forest that they could use as a jumping-off place. When they got to the town, they found it was barely a town at all, more like a trading post where the local Indians would come to buy whatever supplies they needed. Though John and Ross were experienced woodsmen, they knew that they would need a guide to take them into the rugged country.

They thought it would be easy to hire a guide, but they soon discovered that it was nearly impossible. Though the Indians were very poor and quite obviously needed work of some sort, when they were asked about becoming guides they always came up with an excuse as to why they couldn't. Either their wife or mother was sick, and they had to stay behind to attend her. Or they were waiting for another party that they guided every year and could not disappoint. Or they had to go somewhere else and didn't know anything about the woods. These excuses were all transparently false. What was clear was that the local Indians didn't want to go into the woods, no matter how much money they were offered. After hanging around the trading post for a couple of days, John and Ross discovered the real reason. The Indians were afraid to go into the woods because the woods were said to be inhabited by the Wendango.

The men from Philadelphia were not quite sure what the Wendango was supposed to be—some sort of real creature or a demon or spirit of the woods. But whatever it was, it had the Indians of the area terrified. They said that no one who had ever seen the thing remained alive and sane.

The Wendango worked in strange ways. It would pick out a particular person in a group. The person would begin to hear strange noises and smell

strange smells that no one else in the group could hear or smell. Sometimes the man who had been chosen as victim by the Wendango would say that he could see the creature's eyes glowing in the darkness beyond the firelight. But no one else was ever able to see the glowing eyes.

Finally the Wendango would begin to call to its victim, and that would be the end. No one could resist the call of the Wendango. The victim would rush out into the woods and never be seen again—or almost never. A few of the Wendango's victims had been found later. What had happened to them? When asked that question, the Indians would just turn away. They did not want to talk about it. It was too horrible.

Now, John and Ross regarded all of this business about the Wendango as ignorant superstition, and they didn't want to have their trip ruined because of it. They persisted in trying to find a guide and finally they found one. He was an Indian named DaFago, who was desperately in need of money. When they offered DaFago twice the usual guide's fee, he reluctantly agreed to take the men into the woods.

DaFago was silent most of the time. He marched grimly through the woods ahead of his charges and communicated mainly by pointing, or with an occasional grunt. After they had been in the woods for two days, DaFago's manner changed. From time to time he would stop suddenly and look around, as though he had heard a strange noise. John and Ross heard nothing unusual. Then DaFago would put his nose in the air and begin to sniff, as though he had caught the faint odor of something strange. John and Ross could smell nothing unusual. When they asked the Indian what was going on, he would not answer.

The hunters had been out for a week, and each day DaFago's actions became stranger and stranger. He never seemed to sleep but sat up all night listening and watching. But for what? He said nothing. John and Ross became genuinely concerned for their guide's sanity and for their own safety, for they would be lost in the woods without him.

Then one evening a snowstorm hit. Such storms were not uncommon in autumn in that part of Canada. Though they might be violent, they usually didn't last too long.

The men built a fire and prepared to spend the night. DaFago assumed his usual attitude, sitting by the fire listening and watching, but this night, in the storm, he seemed to be more tense and alert than ever.

The wind was howling through the trees, and the noise kept John and Ross awake. As they listened to the wind, it began to sound as if it was a voice in the distance calling, "Da-Faaaaaay-go! Da-Faaaaaaaay-go!"

"Do you hear that?" said John.

"No I don't," said Ross, "and you don't either. It's just the wind. You can't let your imagination get the better of you. We're in enough trouble already. We're in the middle of the woods in a snowstorm, and our guide is going nuts."

The two men finally fell asleep. They were awakened again by a scream—not an imaginary scream but a real scream, very close. They crawled out of the tent and saw DaFago standing by the fire with his hands over his ears—and screaming.

Then from out of the woods, the wind, or something, called: "Da-Faaaaaaaay-go! Da-Faaaaay-go!" Out there in the darkness John and Ross

thought they saw two red glowing eyes. Or was it just an illusion?

DaFago gave one more scream. "My feet are burning! They are fiery wings and I must fly!" Then he rushed off into the darkness.

John and Ross were terrified, but they knew there was nothing they could do until the sun came up. As soon as it did, they tried to follow DaFago's trail in the snow.

His moccasin prints were easy to see in the fresh snow. After a short while they were joined by another set of prints. These seemed to have been made by a creature with gigantic bearlike feet. The two sets of prints ran side by side, and it looked as if the guide and the creature had been walking together.

As they followed the trail, John and Ross noticed that the human prints began to change. They began to resemble more and more those of the creature. Finally they were exactly the same shape as those of the creature, only smaller.

Then suddenly and mysteriously, both sets of prints vanished.

The two men now realized that they were in great danger. They decided that nothing could be gained by searching for their missing guide. They had better try to get back to civilization as quickly as possible, before DaFago's terrible fate overtook them.

It was to be a hard trip back, for without a guide the men could not find the trails.

Three days later John and Ross were sitting by their campfire when they heard a noise in the woods. Out from among the trees staggered a figure. It took a moment for them to recognize that the figure was the missing DaFago. He had been greatly changed in so short a period of time. His face was cut and scarred, and his clothes, or what was left of them, were in tatters. He barely seemed able to speak; he just cried and groaned. He could say only one word, *Wendango*.

John and Ross rushed to help the guide. They half dragged, half carried, poor DaFago to the fire. In the flickering light he looked even worse than he had in the shadows—he looked barely human. Then, remembering the footprints he had seen in the snow, John glanced down—and screamed.

"Oh, my God! Look at his feet!"

"The Wendango," in one version or another, is one of the most popular of campfire tales. It is based only very loosely on genuine Indian lore, but it has been making the rounds of summer camps since at least the 1920s.

The most effective way to end the story is to lower your voice progressively until you get to the last line, and then scream it out and point at the feet of someone in the group. Everyone will automatically look at the feet of the person you have pointed out.

The Missing Bride

Just outside of town there is a very large old house. Most people can't see it too well anymore, because it's pretty far back from the road. The bushes around it have grown very high and haven't been trimmed for ages. It's abandoned, and it has been for a long time. But in its heyday it was the finest house in town. Everybody admired and envied the people who lived there.

The house was owned by the Sanderson family, maybe it still is. But there are no Sandersons around to live in it. They all moved away a long time ago, and when they left they closed the house up. They never came back, and never will. They'll never be able to sell that house, either, not after what happened there on the day that young Bruce Sanderson was married.

Young Bruce was one of those fellows upon whom one could say fortune had smiled. He was handsome, intelligent, rich, and above all he was happy. His enthusiasm and the sheer joy he got out of life were almost childlike. They were also infectious. People in town used to say that there was no such thing as a good party if Bruce wasn't there, and no possibility of a bad one if he was. Everybody liked Bruce, and Bruce liked everybody. He particularly liked Mary Burnham. In fact, he loved her. He had loved her since they were children.

At first glance you might think that they were the perfect couple. She was as beautiful as he was handsome. Everyone said they looked wonderful together. She was also rich. The Burnhams weren't quite as rich as the Sandersons, but quite rich enough. Both families certainly encouraged the relationship.

In temperament, however, Mary and Bruce were as different as two people could possibly be. While he was always talking and laughing, she rarely said more than two words to anyone. People who wanted to be kind said that she was reserved, but most people described her as depressed and gloomy. She was so morose that people used to wonder if there were something that had happened to her, or something that she knew but

couldn't talk about, that made her so unhappy. There was lots of speculation and gossip, but no one really knew anything for sure. Still, it had to be admitted, even by those who didn't like Mary very much, that walking around with a frown all day didn't hurt her looks one bit. In fact, it made her look more beautiful and appealing than ever, sort of like an enigmatic tragic heroine.

That must have been the way Bruce felt about Mary. He had pursued her with a single-minded devotion for years. Finally she agreed to marry him. No one thought she really wanted to marry him. She was just worn down by his energy, his persistence, and by the entreaties of her own family.

So the big day was finally set, and half the town was invited up to the Sanderson place for the wedding and

reception. The other half of the town stood around gnashing their teeth in envy.

It was, of course, the most lavish wedding this town had ever seen. There were tons of orange blossoms and hundreds of Chinese lanterns, and not one but two orchestras. And enough food to feed two towns this size, and so much drink that several men were heard to remark that they felt as if they had died and gone to heaven.

In the middle of all of this celebration were the bride and groom. Mary in her white satin gown, looking more beautiful and more tragic than ever. And Bruce, whose usual high spirits now soared beyond all bounds.

It was undoubtedly Bruce who had the idea of playing hide-and-seek. Party games were very unusual for a wedding celebration, but Bruce was passionately devoted to them, and everybody, at least all of the young people, were ready to follow him.

The Sanderson house with its many rooms and extensive grounds was a perfect setting for a game of hide-and-seek. Bruce and his friends had played the game at the house many times. Bruce said that Mary should have the honor of hiding first. She shook her head and said no in her soft voice.

Bruce insisted, and as usual he overwhelmed all opposition by his sheer enthusiasm. Reluctantly Mary agreed that she would hide.

All of the guests covered their eyes and started counting, as Mary, still in her long white wedding dress, walked from the room. They gave her to the count of one hundred, and then everyone fanned out for the

search. Practically everyone thought the game would not take more than a few moments, because Mary didn't really ever put her heart into a game. She would just pick an obvious hiding place and be found easily. At least that's what people thought at first.

All of the obvious hiding places were searched and Mary could not be found. Some of the less obvious places were checked, and then the places that no one would ever think of. Still she remained hidden. Bruce was very pleased. Mary had gotten into the spirit of the game for the first time in her life—and she had won.

He called for her to come out, come cut, wherever she was. There was no answer. Others began calling. Still no answer. People went all through the house and the grounds calling for Mary to come out, with an increasing sense of puzzlement shading into anxiety and even panic.

After an hour of searching and calling, everyone in the wedding party realized that the new bride very definitely was missing. The police chief and several members of the force were already at the wedding, and they began an official investigation immediately. Nothing turned up.

Bruce maintained a veneer of optimism, but as the days, weeks, and finally months dragged on, even his heroically cheerful spirit cracked. And he finally began to realize that Mary wasn't coming back.

The town speculated—gossiped would be a better word—endlessly over what might have happened. The general consensus was that whatever the secret sorrow was that Mary suffered from, it had driven her to run away from her own wedding. The more ghoulish thought she ran off and killed herself at some lonely spot, while the more worldly insisted that she had a boyfriend somewhere and just took off with him.

Bruce was broken by the ordeal, as were his parents. They determined to close up the house and go away, at least for a while. They wanted to put some distance between themselves and the scene of the disastrous wedding and the town gossip.

All the furniture in the house was to be covered with sheets to prevent it from becoming dusty while they were away. But there was a shortage of sheets. One of the maids was told to look in the attic to see if any sheets had been stored there.

She found an old trunk. It was locked, but with the aid of a hairpin she easily picked the lock. Inside was what first appeared to be a pile of white satin sheets. But when she reached in to pull out the sheets, she realized that there was something else in the trunk, and her scream brought everyone rushing to the attic.

The maid had found Mary, or what was left of Mary after having been locked in a trunk for six months. Actually, she was remarkably well preserved for someone who had been dead so long. The trunk was practically airtight, so the body had not so much rotted as it had dried out and mummified. Mary was still recognizable, though most of her flesh was gone and her skin was now stretched tightly over her highly visible bones.

No one would have called her beautiful now, but she did finally look as if she was smiling—or grinning as skeletons do.

No one knows for sure what happened, but the police guessed that poor Mary really had tried to throw herself into the spirit of the game for the first and last time in her life. She had run all the way up to the attic and hidden herself inside the old trunk. It was a good hiding place; no one would ever think of looking there. Too good, for the trunk locked when she closed it, and no one was able to hear her screams for help. Suffocation is a horrible way to die.

That's why the Sanderson house is abandoned, and why no one wants to buy it—ever.

Cheap Wheels

"There's no such thing as a free lunch."

"You get what you pay for."

These two hoary old sayings had been guiding principles of Alexander MacLaran's life. So when he saw an ad in the paper offering an "almost new" Porsche for fifty dollars, he was suspicious, highly suspicious. Must be a misprint, he thought. Five hundred dollars for such a car would have been ridiculous, even five thousand would be an unbelievable price. Still, he came up with a couple of other hoary old sayings to fit the situation.

"Nothing ventured, nothing gained."

"Don't look a gift horse in the mouth."

Fortified with this ancient wisdom, he went down to the address in the ad to look at the car. He had expected to see potential buyers lined up around the block. But there was no one else. All of the others had figured, as had Alex. that the ad must be a typographical error. Unlike Alex, they had not bothered to check it out.

The door was answered by a nice looking young lady, and Alex, not one to waste time, got right to the point. "Are you the one who advertised a Porsche for fifty dollars?"

"Yes," she said

"Then the ad was no typographical error."

"No, of course not. The car's in the garage. Do you want to see it?"

Alex certainly did want to see it. It was beautiful. He could just imagine himself riding around in it. But he was essentially a cautious and realistic

fellow, not one to be carried away by wishful thinking and imagination. There has to be something wrong with this deal, he thought.

"Can I drive it?" he said.

"Certainly. You can't buy a car without giving it a test drive. I'll go with you."

Alex drove the car around the block and around the neighborhood. It was a marvelous car. While there was obviously something fishy about the whole deal, Alex no longer cared. He reached into his pocket, pulled out fifty dollars, and handed it to the woman. She in turn gave him all the necessary papers. He looked them over and found everything was in order. The deal was legal, the Porsche was his for a measly fifty bucks.

"All right," he said when all the papers had been signed. "What's the catch? Why did you just sell this car to me for fifty dollars?"

The woman smiled, and then she began to laugh. It was not a pleasant laugh. When she finally stopped laughing, she explained to Alex what had happened.

"A couple of weeks ago my husband ran off with his secretary. Just the other day I got a telegram from him saying that he is never coming back, and that i should sell the car and the house and send him the money.

"You don't know anybody who wants to buy a house for a hundred dollars, do you?

———————

Today all of the auto companies are advertising the "new" fuel-efficient cars. Well, it's nothing but a big ripoff, a fraud. Years ago engineers in Detroit discovered how to make a car that gets nearly one thousand miles per gallon of gas.

Naturally, if a car like that ever got on the market, it would just about bankrupt all the big oil companies. The oil companies and the car

companies are all tied up together, and they decided that the car had to be kept secret.

It was only because of an accident that John Q. Public ever even got a hint that such a car existed. One of the experimental models somehow got mixed in with a regular shipment of cars. It wound up in a dealership in Cleveland where a woman bought it. She kept driving the car and driving it, and the tank never seemed to empty. She thought there was something wrong with the car, and she took it back to the dealer for repairs!

Meanwhile back in Detroit, company bigwigs were frantically looking for the missing experimental model. As soon as they got wind of what had happened in Cleveland, they rushed down there. They gave the lady a new car and $30,000 for her "trouble." They told her to keep quiet about the car because it might give the company a bad name.

Of course, Detroit always denies that such a car has ever existed. What do you expect them to do?

_____

Would you like to buy a World War II vintage Harley-Davidson motorcycle for $75? That may not mean much to the average person, but it makes a motorcycle freak's mouth water.

It seems that back at the beginning of World War II the army bought up thousands of Harley-Davidsons and stored them in a huge warehouse in west Texas. Then with typical army bureaucratic bungling, they just forgot about the motorcycles. All of those motorcycles had been sitting in the warehouse for nearly forty years before someone discovered them. They are in perfect condition.

The army has been discreetly offering the Harley-Davidsons for sale at $75 each. But you have to buy them in lots of five, and it's very hard to find out exactly which army department is selling them.

All of these cheap-wheels stories have become classic modern legends. The story that folklorists label "The Philanderer's Porsche" has not only been retold as true all over the country, but versions of it have also appeared in newspapers both here and in Europe,

Novice reporters have been known to spend hours trying to track down the source of rumors about the experimental car that runs on water, or about the mint-condition Harley-Davidsons or Model A Fords or whatever that had somehow been shunted aside and were now being offered for sale. While plenty of people have heard the rumors, the original sources never seem to be known.

The Solid Cement Cadillac

Harry Eames was really crazy about his wife, Julie. He was always kind and considerate. He never forgot her birthday or their anniversary. All she had to do was express the slightest desire to have something, and Harry would move heaven and earth to get it for her.

The relationship wasn't quite perfect. Harry had one fault—he was insanely jealous. If Julie so much as smiled at another man, Harry would blow up. He distrusted the mailman, the milkman, the delivery man, the meter reader, the paperboy—every male that Julie might come in contact with when he wasn't around.

They had a thousand fights over his jealousy. Harry would always wind up admitting that Julie was right. She had never given him any cause to be jealous. Besides, this was the twentieth century. She could not be locked up in a harem or go about the streets with her face hidden behind a veil. Harry knew that his jealousy was irrational and destructive. He did everything he could to curb it. He made resolution after resolution.

Often weeks would go by and he would be just as sweet as could be. Julie would begin to hope and even to believe that he had finally conquered his mad jealousy. Then one day there would be some trivial incident. Julie might smile at the vegetable man in thc A & P, and that would set him off. He would explode, and there would be a big fight and the inevitable reconciliation in which Harry would abjectly admit to his bad behavior and swear that he would do better next time.

On this particular day, Harry was going through one of his regular periods of deep remorse. He felt that his jealousy was wrecking his marriage. Harry worked for a construction company. One of the several jobs that he did was to drive a ready-mix cement truck. On the day in question he was delivering a load of wet cement to a construction site not far from his own home. On the spur of the moment he decided that he would make a small detour and pop in on Julie to apologize once again for how badly he had been behaving.

When he came within sight of his house, he saw that there was a strange car parked in his driveway. It was a large, shiny Cadillac convertible, with the top down. It was the kind of car that you don't see very often anymore.

Whose car was it? Instantly jealousy rose in Harry's mind and pushed out all his previous feelings of remorse and resolutions of calm and trust. He parked his truck about a block away and snuck back to his house.

As he crept around the back of the house, Harry heard voices coming from the kitchen. He peered in the window, and there was his wife talking to a handsome and well-dressed young man whom he had never seen before. The couple were laughing and joking together. He could imagine whom they were laughing at.

"I knew it," he said to himself. "I knew it. All of these years she has been lying to me. I wonder how many guys like this there have been. I'll bet they're having a great big joke at my expense."

For a moment Harry thought about bursting into the house and confronting the guilty couple. But what good would that do? They would just lie to him. Julie had been lying to him for years. She might even be able to convince him that she was innocent, as she had so many times in the past.

Then Harry had a brilliant idea for revenge. He crept out of the yard and back to his truck. He pulled the truck up alongside the Cadillac convertible in the driveway. The truck made a lot of noise, but as Harry sourly observed, they must have been having such a good time back there that they didn't hear a thing. Then Harry dumped the whole load of cement into the convertible, filling it completely.

He drove away, feeling immensely satisfied with himserf.

When Harry returned home that evening, he decided to play it cool and act as if nothing had happened.

"Hi, honey, I'm home," he called out cheerfully. "Anything important happen today?"

As soon as Julie heard his voice, she broke down. "Oh, Harry," she wailed. "The most awful thing has happened."

And then she explained. The Cadillac was a present that Julie had bought for Harry out of a small inheritance she had received. She knew Harry was a real car nut and had always wanted a car like that, but they would never be able to afford one. So she bought it for him as a surprise. The strange man was the car dealer, and the two of them had been sitting in the kitchen signing the final purchase papers. They had been laughing over how surprised Harry would be when he came home and found the car of his dreams parked in the driveway.

This extremely popular urban legend is told all over the country in many different versions. In some the wife really is having an affair, usually with the man's best friend. The punch line in such versions is that the friend has the cement-filled car towed away and is never able to say a word about it, because then he would have to explain what he was doing visiting the man's wife in the middle of the afternoon.

The story is also told throughout Europe, though it apparently originated in the United States.

Druglore

Willie, Kent, and George had all gone to high school together, and after they graduated, they all went off to the same college. First they had lived in the dorms, but later they found a nice little off-campus apartment to share.

Willie and Kent had adjusted well to college. They had managed to keep their grades up and still get around and have some fun. George was different. Suddenly being in college gave him a lot of freedom that he had never had before, and he couldn't handle it. He got heavily into drugs, and his work went down the drain. He barely attended classes anymore and certainly would not be allowed to continue in school after the end of the semester.

Willie and Kent felt very sorry for their old friend and roommate. They knew he was basically a good guy, but weak and immature. Perhaps the shock of flunking out and having to return home would help snap him out of his downward slide, so that in a year or so he would be able to go back to college. That is, if his drug problem hadn't already become too great.

George was a lot of trouble for his friends. He might disappear for days on end and then come back in the middle of the night and start banging on the door to be let in. He was always borrowing money, which he never paid back. And once he even stole Kent's typewriter and pawned it.

Most of all, Willie and Kent were afraid of the police. The local police as well as the campus cops were cracking down hard on drugs. Time after time George promised that he would never bring anything into the apartment, but neither Willie nor Kent really believed such promises anymore because they had been broken so many times. If George ever did something really crazy and the apartment was raided by the cops, and the cops found something, well, then they could all be in big trouble. Even if Willie and Kent were completely innocent, there was no guarantee that the police would believe them.

Time after time they had discussed what to do. Should they throw George out? Should they contact his parents or the school authorities? In the end they always decided against doing anything. George was, after all, an old friend. The three of them had been through a lot together. None of them were saints, and just because he was having a really hard time at the moment, that was no excuse for throwing him to the wolves. Besides, they rationalized, it was just a few weeks until the end of the semester, and after that it would all be over. George certainly would not be coming back to school, and Willie and Kent would be spared the unpleasant task of turning him in. Their big hope was that George could only keep from doing something completely crazy until the end of the semester.

But George couldn't. One evening he came back to the apartment after a three-day absence in the worst condition his roommates could ever recall seeing him in. Heaven knows what he had been taking or where he got it. He was completely incoherent. All he could do was mumble and grunt and stagger around the room bumping into things.

Willie and Kent tried to get him into bed, but he wouldn't lie down or even sit down. George rushed into the bathroom and locked the door. A few moments later, Willie and Kent heard wild screaming coming from the bathroom. The door flew open and George burst out. He had taken off all his clothes and started to run madly around the room, shouting at the top of his lungs, "There's a barracuda in the toilet!"

There was no way to silence him. Willie and Kent couldn't even catch him.

In a few moments the neighbors would be calling the cops because of the noise. Willie and Kent knew that then they would have a lot of explaining to do. They decided it was better to anticipate the trouble by calling the cops themselves.

"Hello, police? Listen, we got a big problem. Our roommate has gone crazy. I mean he's really freaked out. You better get over here right away, otherwise who knows what's going to happen," Willie said.

Within three minutes Willie and Kent heard the sirens scream to a halt in front of their building. They heard feet pounding up the stairs and then a

loud knocking at the door. Kent opened the door, and there stood two uniformed policemen. The cops came in and looked suspiciously around the room.

While all of this was going on, George had not calmed down one little bit. He was still running around the room stark naked, yelling, "There's a barracuda in the toilet! There's a barracuda in the toilet!" as loud as he could.

The cops stood there looking puzzled and finally one of them said, "All right, where is this crazy guy?"

_____

A couple of policemen came to the local high school to talk about the dangers of drugs. At the end of the talk, one of the cops took out a box containing ten marijuana cigarettes.

"Now, I want you to know what these things look like, so in case someone ever offers you one you can turn it down. I want you to take a real close look, so I'm going to pass these ten joints around. But before class is over I want all ten of them back. If I don't get all ten back, nobody leaves the room and we'll have to conduct a complete search."

When the policeman collected them again, he counted. This time there were eleven.

The drug culture has spawned an enormous number of legends, some humorous, like the ones given here, which are designed primarily to show the foolishness of the police. There are plenty of darker legends as well. Because the drug culture is underground, it is a perfect breeding place for legends and rumors. The wildest rumors take hold and sweep the country.

There was a widespread rumor that banana peels dried and smoked produce a powerful narcotic effect. The product was called "mellow yellow." The rumor was completely untrue, but for a time it fooled even the

police. There were also tales of an eccentric millionaire who used to give away free drugs in a San Francisco park. People lined up for them, but the millionaire never showed up because he never existed.

Out of the Grave

A North Carolina man named Samuel Jocelyn was out riding his horse when the animal was frightened by a dog, bolted, and threw Jocelyn to the ground. It was a terrible fall, and when the local doctor reached the scene there was nothing he could do but declare Jocelyn dead. Shortly thereafter, Samuel Jocelyn was given an appropriate burial.

A couple of nights after the funeral Jocelyn's old friend Alexander Hostler had a bad dream. He dreamed that his friend Jocelyn appeared before him.

"How could you let me be buried when I was not dead?" said the apparition.

"But you were dead," answered Hostler.

"No I wasn't," replied the ghost. "Open my coffin. You wil see that I am not lying the way I was buried."

Hostler tried to ignore the dream, but he had it again the next night, and the next. Finally he just couldn't stand it any longer. He convinced a friend to go with him to the graveyard at night. The two dug up Jocelyn's grave and opened the coffin. When they shone their light into the coffin they found that the apparition in Hostler's dream had been telling the truth. Jocelyn had been buried face up, just like everyone else. Now the corpse was lying face down. The body had somehow turned over in its coffin, after burial.

The turn may have been part of Jocelyn's frantic attempts to get out of the coffin before he suffocated.

_____

Some years ago a small town in Louisiana was struck by an epidemic of typhoid fever. Many of those who came down with the disease died quickly. One of those stricken was a young woman who had such a serious case that everyone felt sure she was going to die.

This woman was very close to her oldest brother, but he happened to be away when she got sick. As her condition worsened, he was sent for, and he rushed home as fast as he could. But the trip back wasn't an easy one. There were a number of unexpected delays, and by the time he arrived, his sister was already dead. In fact, he had even missed the funeral, which had taken place just a few hours before he arrived back in town.

The grief-stricken brother went to the cemetery, where he found the gravediggers just finishing their work on his sister's grave, tossing the last few shovelfuls of dirt back into the hole. He begged the gravediggers to open the grave so that he could see his sister just one more time. They refused his request. But the brother would not go away. He stood there begging and pleading so loudly that he began to collect a crowd.

He shouted to the people who had gathered that all he wanted to do was look at his sister one more time. Most of the people knew him, and knew how close he had been to his sister. He was such a pitiful sight, and so persistent, that several of the local people said that they would open the grave themselves just to satisfy his request, and to keep him from making a further spectacle of himself.

The earth was soft, and so the digging went very quickly. The coffin was uncovered and opened. The grieving man then looked down on his sister for what he was sure would be the last time. He was standing there weeping when one of the people in the crowd thought he saw the "corpse" move slightly. At first he dismissed what he had seen as a hallucination. Then others in the crowd saw movement, and they began whispering to each other. The "corpse" actually began to shake itself, and people in the crowd started to shout. The grief-stricken brother nearly fainted in astonishment. Then the "corpse" actually sat up, and finally stepped right out of the coffin. The young woman had not been dead at all. Because of the disease, she had fallen into a coma and looked as if she were dead. If her brother had not arrived late for her funeral, she would have remained buried alive and surely would have suffocated underground.

People say that after "coming back to life" the woman lived for many years and raised a large family.

_____

Diane's family was wealthy and socially prominent, so when she fell in love with Ben, the son of a local laborer, her parents were not too pleased.

At first the family tried to ignore the relationship, hoping that it would fade away as most young loves do. But it didn't. Indeed, matters became more and more serious and intense.

Diane's parents forbade her to see Ben. That didn't work either, because they couldn't keep her locked in her room all the time. They tried to put pressure on Ben's parents to keep their son away. Ben's parents didn't want trouble with the richest people in town and would have been happy to keep their son away from Diane. But they didn't have any real controi over Ben's actions. Finally Diane's parents hit upon an old-fashioned solution—they decided to send Diane away.

She was sent to a strict boarding school, really more like a prison. No telephone calls were allowed, and the mail was carefully watched. Diane was miserable. But it was far worse for Ben. Cut off from his love, he

seemed to lose interest in living. He got sick, and very quickly he just died. The doctors weren't even sure what he died of. His body had just given up.

Diane's parents were not evil, and they were overcome with remorse. They now knew they had done something quite terrible, but they couldn't bring themselves to tell Diane about Ben's death.

A short time later, Diane was returning to her dormitory at school when she saw one of her family's cars drive up. Most astonishingly, the driver was Ben.

He looked terribly pale and anguished. "My God Ben. What's wrong? What's happened?"

"Your family asked me to come and get you," he said. "I don't know why."

Without bothering to get permission or even to tell anyone that she was leaving the school, Diane jumped into the car.

During the long drive back, Ben said practically nothing. He usually didn't talk much, but Diane felt that his extreme silence indicated something was wrong. She was very worried about him. She reached over to touch his forehead—it was cold and clammy.

"Ben, are you sick?" she said.

"I'm all right."

"You must be cold. Here, take my scarf." She carefully wound her long woolen muffler around his neck.

When the car pulled up in front of the house, Diane jumped out and rushed inside. Her parems were surprised—no, shocked—to see her. They were even more shocked when she told them why she had come and who brought her.

Her father then explained to her that Ben was dead. But she refused to believe it. If he was dead, who had been in the car with her? When they

went outside, the car was there, the engine was still warm, but there was no sign of Ben.

Diane and her parents went to the home of Ben's parents, who sadly confirmed that their son was really dead. But when they heard Diane's story, they too were shocked and more than a little frightened. The only thing to do was to open the grave, which they did the very next morning. Ben's body was in the coffin, just as it should have been. But wrapped around the corpse's neck was Diane's long woolen muffler.

Fears of being buried alive were common during the last century, and for some people the fear was almost an obsession. This fear gave rise to a large number of legends and stories. Some of Edgar Allan Poe's best tales, for example, are about being buried alive. Fear also inspired inventors to patent many devices to protect people from this horrible fate. Coffins equipped with bells, flags, periscopes, air holes, and other devices designed to save the unlucky from the ghastly prospect of premature burial were manufactured and sold. There is, to my knowledge, not a single case in which any of these devices ever saved anyone's life. While it was certainly possible to be buried alive, particulary during an epidemic when doctors were overworked and there was a great rush to get the dead buried as quickly as possible, it was something that probably didn't happen very often.

Today the possibility of being buried alive is virtually zero, but the legends continue, though they do not form as large a segment of our frightening folklore as they did a century or so ago.

The Second Blue Book

Many colleges still use special blue-covered exam booklets. They are called, appropriately enough, blue books, and are filled with lined paper. These books are handed out at the beginning of an exam, and the students must write their answers to essay questions in these special books. The books are supposed to ensure that the students don't come in with pre-prepared answers.

Steve was a student at Upstate University. He was very bright and could have had straight As, except for one small problem that he had. Steve hated to work. He loved to party, and he figured he was smart enough to bluff his way through exams. Sometimes he was right, sometimes he wasn't. He was right often enough to be able to stay in school—but wrong often enough that he was just barely hanging in there.

As final exams approached, Steve found that this semester he was losing more often than he was winning. He faced the very real possibility that his semester average would be so low that he would actually flunk out of school. Which would mean that he would have to go home and might actually have to get a *Job*. The thought sickened him.

Steve had only one final left, American Lit. He didn't know a great deal about American literature, but almost by accident he had read a couple of the books that had been assigned. So he was confident that he would be able to bluff his way through the final, and that this grade would be high enough to give him a passing average.

Steve was calm and assured as he entered the classroom to take the exam. He remained calm and assured as the professor handed each student two blue books. His calm began to shatter as the professor wrote two questions on the board. They were the only two questions on the exam.

The second question was about something that Steve had read, and instantly a brilliant series of connections were made in his mind. His answer to question two would give him an A on that part of the exam.

Question one was another matter. It was about something that he had never read, never even heard of. He drew a complete blank. There was nothing he could say about question one.

The result would be an exam score of fifty, not good enough for a passing grade in the course and certainly not good enough to carry the rest of his marginal marks. The horrible specter of a job rose before him. But he took a few breaths and did not panic. Steve had a plan.

He started filling the first book with anything that came into his head. Advertising slogans, nursery rhymes, anything. All he had to do was look as if he were working hard.

When he had filled the first book with all that nonsense, he took the second book and wrote a big number "2" on the cover. Then he wrote what appeared to be the last sentence of an answer to the first question. Right under that, he began his answer for question number two. It was a beautifully worked-out answer, a sure A. When the exam was over, Steve got in a crowd of other students turning in their exam books. But he turned in only the second book. The first one was carefully hidden under his shirt.

A few anxious days later Steve got a postcard from his American Lit professor. Steve was told that he got an A in the course. The professor also apologized for having lost the first part of his exam.

Steve's partner in indolence, his friend Jack, had an even worse problem. He didn't know the answer to either of the questions. But he was even cooler and more resourceful than Steve. Jack took one of the blue books and used it to write a letter to his mother in Boston. He said that he was writing to her because he had already finished his final exam and was waiting for a friend to finish. He apologized for not writing sooner but said that he had been studying very hard for this particular test and had had no time. He also said that he thought he did pretty well on the test, but that the professor, though a good guy, had very high standards.

When time was up, Jack handed in only the blue book with the letter to his mother in it. He had the blank blue book hidden in his notebook. He rushed back to his room, looked up the answers to the questions, and wrote them in

the blue book. Then he put the blue book in an envelope and mailed it to his mother.

A few hours later Jack got a call from the professor, who was very puzzled. He wanted to know why Jack had given him a letter to his mother in Boston and not the answers to the final exam. Jack gasped. He said that there must have been a horrible mix-up and that he had by mistake handed in the letter to his mother and mailed his exam to Boston. He offered to call his mother in Boston, explain the situation, and have her mail back the letter, unopened, to prove that no one had tampered with it. The professor agreed to this plan, so Jack called his mother. She mailed back the unopened envelope with the blue book containing the answers Jack had looked up after the exam. Jack gave it to his professor. Jack got a B on his final.

Sometimes schools don't use blue books. What do you do then? Well, Lance, who went to high school in Los Angeles, came up with an ingenious solution when he was given a difficult two-page quiz. He knew that there was no way in the world he would be able to finish the entire test. So he spent all his time working on the second page. At the end of the period he handed in only the second page, concealing the first page in his notebook.

He used the next period to quickly look up the answers to the questions on the first page and write them in. Then he took the test paper, threw it on the ground, and trampled all over it. He gave the paper to a friend who had a later class in the same room.

When the friend handed the dirty, stepped-on paper to the teacher, he said that he had found it on the floor "in the back" and thought it might be important. The teacher checked through all of the test papers, and sure enough, Lance's paper was missing the first page. When the two pages were marked together, Lance got an A on the test.

In folklore throughout the world there is a familiar figure called the trickster. He or she may be a person or an animal, usually one who is weak or in an inferior position. Somehow the trickster manages to outwit those above him. In the stories it may be the rabbit outwitting the fox, the slave

outwitting his master, the poor man outwitting the rich man, the simple farmer putting one over on the city slicker. In modern stories it is often the student outwitting the teacher, as these extremely popular tales of exam trickery demonstrate. With one variation or another they have been repeated all over the country.

By the way, don't be tempted to try these tricks yoursell. As I said, these are very well known stories, and teachers, who once were students, know them as well as students. If the tricks ever worked in the first place, which is doubtful, they certainly are not going to work anymore.

The Hand of

Charity Hawthorne

Joe Linet wasn't afraid of anything—at least to hear him tell it. He bragged about the time he went swimming in shark-infested waters. And about the time he had taken a loaded gun away from a burglar. And about the time he had calmly stepped into a burning barn to rescue a frightened horse at the risk of his own life.

His friends, or at least the people who knew him, for nobody really liked him, doubted most of his stories. But there was no way to prove him wrong, no way to shut him up. They just had to endure those endless, and probably untrue, stories.

As Joe was winding up a thrilling (to him) account of how he had spent one vacation diving off the high cliffs at Acapulco, Pete Judson, a member of his captive audience, said: "I guess there isn't much that you're afraid of."

"There isn't anything I'm afraid of," said Joe.

"You're not afraid of ghosts?"

"I don't even believe in ghosts," said Joe. "And I'm certainly not afraid of them."

"Then I suppose you wouldn't be afraid to go into the graveyard at midnight, and lay to rest the ghost of Charity Hawthorne."

"Huh?" said Joe. He hadn't expected that.

"You know the old part of the cemetery. The part where they have graves from a hundred or two hundred years ago."

Joe didn't, but he nodded his head yes anyway.

"Well, if you go into the cemetery," continued Pete, "you'll find that it's pretty crowded with graves. But there's one grave that is set apart from al! the others, up on a little mound. You can't miss it.

"That's the grave of Charity Hawthorne. She died back in the 1820s, and everybody said that she was a witch. Now, they weren't burning people as witches then, but that's not to say there weren't a lot of people in this town who wouldn't have liked to have seen Charity Hawthorne burned. She was an old woman with an evil reputation. It was said that she could cause people and animals to get sick just by looking at them. They said that she had the evil eye. People said a lot of other things about her too. That the devil would visit her in her house. And that whenever a child disappeared, the child wound up in Charity's cooking pot."

"You don't believe any of that superstitious nonsense," protested Joe.

"I'm not saying I believe it. I'm just telling you what a lot of people around here did believe back then. They couldn't prove anything against her. So when she died, she had every right to be buried in the graveyard along with everybody else. Still, people saw to it that her grave would be set well away from the others, so that she wouldn't contaminate them after death.

"Now, here's the point. It was said that Charity was pretty angry about the way she had been buried, and that on many nights she gets up out of her grave and walks around the other tombstones."

"I've never heard that," said Joe.

"You weren't born here," said Pete. "People here don't like to talk about it to outsiders. They're afraid they'll be laughed at."

"Anybody should laugh at that silly story."

"If it's just a silly story," continued Pete, "then you won't mind going into the graveyard and putting an end to it once and for all. According to the story, the only way to keep Charity's ghost in its grave is to go into the cemetery at midnight, kneel down on her grave, and plunge a dagger into it."

"Piece of cake," smirked Joe.

"I'm not through yet," said Pete. "You have to do this at midnight. If you don't do it just exactly at the stroke of twelve, Charity Hawthorne's bony hand will reach up from out of the grave, grab you, and pull you under."

Pete said those last words with such conviction that Joe shuddered slightly. But he was committed, trapped, by his own bragging.

"Piece of cake," he repeated, but with somewhat less assurance than before.

"You can do it tonight," said Pete. "We'll all go to the graveyard with you. But we'll only go up to the fence. You'll have to go in by yourself. Maybe we don't believe in ghosts either, but we don't like to take chances." The others in the group nodded in agreement.

Joe really didn't believe in ghosts. And he was no coward. On the other hand, he was not nearly as brave as he pretended he was. Like most of us, he was afraid of ghosts, even if he didn't believe in them. The idea of going into a graveyard at midnight, kneeling down, and plunging a knife into a grave made him more than a little nervous. Just to make things worse, it started to rain. Joe hoped the others would call off the expedition. Of course

they didn't, and at eleven thirty they were all at his front door waiting for him. Joe put on his rain sticker and went out.

"We had better hurry," said Pete. "If we get there after midnight, Charity will be able to get her hand out of the grave."

At the entrance to the graveyard the others stopped. "You'll need this," said Pete, handing Joe a flashlight and a large, old-fashioned dagger. "Now, don't waste any time. If you get there late it might be dangerous. We wouldn't want to be responsible in case anything happened to you."

In the dark and rain it was harder for Joe to find the grave of Charity Hawthorne than he had expected. And by the time he spotted the one grave that was set apart from the others he could already hear the church clock striking midnight. He rushed to the grave, fell to his knees, and plunged the dagger into the wet earth just as the final stroke of midnight died away.

Thank God I was in time, he thought. Now I had better get out of here.

He tried to rise but found that something was pulling at him, holding him on the grave. It's the hand of Charity Hawthorne! he thought with horror.

Outside the graveyard, Pete and the others were having a good laugh.

Of course, there had never been a ghost, or a Charity Hawthorne. Pete had just made the story up because he was sick of all of Joe's bragging. When Joe returned and they told him about the joke, everyone would have a good laugh.

But Joe didn't return, and after about half an hour they began to wonder what had happened. So they went into the graveyard to look for Joe. He was still there, right on top of the grave where he had knelt. He was dead. In his haste. Joe had plunged the dagger right through the bottom of his rain slicker, so when he tried to get up, it seemed as if someone were pulling him back down to the ground.

Poor Joe had died of fright.

The Dinosaur in the Swamp

Johnny lived in a little town in the South. He was like most of the other kids in the town except that he was known to have an exceptionally active imagination. He would wander off for hours, and then he would come back with the most amazing stories about having been kidnapped by gypsies or meeting a flying saucer or something wild like that.

Johnny's mother wasn't terribly surprised when one evening Johnny rushed into the house shouting, "Mommy, Mommy, I saw a dinosaur in the swamp!"

"That's nice," said his mother. "But I hope you didn't play with it. Dr. Brown says that dinosaurs have germs."

Johnny was rather disappointed at the cool reaction, because this time he wasn't making up a story. He really had seen a dinosaur in the swamp.

Johnny tried to tell other people in the town. The reaction was just about the same. Some said, "You should stop telling big lies like that." Or, "Sure, sure you did." Others just snickered and walked away. Now, Johnny was more than disappointed, he was humiliated and angry. He decided that he was going to show everybody in town that he was no liar.

Johnny decided that he was going to make friends with the dinosaur, and then he would make all those people who didn't believe him pay. When he went into the swamp the next time, he took a bag of peanuts with him. When he met the dinosaur he asked it if it wanted a peanut. The dinosaur shook its head to indicate that it didn't.

"That's good," said Johnny, "because then I can eat all of the peanuts myself."

Naturally, as soon as the dinosaur heard that, there was nothing in the world it wanted more than a peanut. It whimpered and begged until Johnny very

reluctantly gave it a peanut, and then another. But first he made the dinosaur promise that if he gave it peanuts, it would do everything he said.

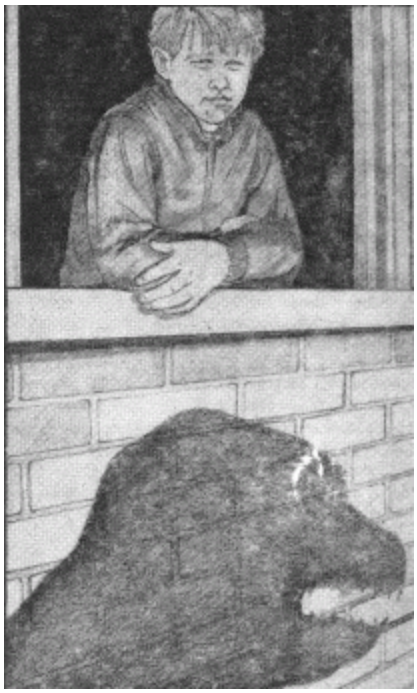
When Johnny went home that evening, he once again told his mother that he had met the dinosaur in the swamp.

"You shouldn't play with dinosaurs," said his mother. "Dr. Brown says that dinosaurs have germs."

"Well," said Johnny. "Dr. Brown shouldn't say such things about dinosaurs. It might make them mad."

His mother ignored the last remark. Later that night when the family was asleep, Johnny snuck back to the swamp, where he found the dinosaur waiting for him. He led the dinosaur to Dr. Brown's house.

The next morning Dr. Brown's neighbors awoke to find that the doctor's house, garage, and lawn had all been stomped out of existence—and Dr. Brown along with them. The only clue that the police were ever able to find was a couple of peanut shells.



After that, Johnny began having the dinosaur stomp out the town a block at a time. On one particularly good night he had the dinosaur stomp his school flat, while a PTA meeting was going on.

Pretty soon there was nothing at all left of the town except the house in which Johnny and his family lived. One afternoon the family were all sitting on the front porch, and Johnny happened to mention that he had seen the dinosaur in the swamp again.

"Well," said Johnny's mother. "I hope you don't play with it, because the late Dr. Brown said that dinosaurs have germs."

Johnny whistled. The dinosaur came bounding out of the swamp. Johnny threw it a peanut and said, "Step on Mother first."

This rather nasty humorous anecdote comes from the collection of folklorist William Koch of Kansas. It has been slightly adapted.

The Cat

in the Bloomie's Bag

Lucy was driving to the shopping mall to do some last-minute Christmas shopping. She was in a hurry and was distracted, so she didn't notice the cat trying to cross the street until it was too late. She hit it, and the instant she did she knew she had killed it. Lucy, who was a cat lover and normally a very careful driver, felt absolutely horrible.

She stopped the car and rushed back to the spot where the cat lay. There was no doubt it was dead. Her only consolation was that the poor animal had probably not even known what hit it. Lucy turned to walk back to her car, but the thought of that poor broken form on the side of the road stopped her. She had killed the cat, and even if she had not meant to, she was still responsible for it. She couldn't just leave it lying there by the side of the road, nor at Christmastime.

Lucy went back to her car and found a bag that had been left in the trunk. It happened to be a Bloomingdale's shopping bag. Gingerly she put the dead cat into the shopping bag and put the bag on the back seat of the car. It seemed heartless to put the poor thing in the trunk. Lucy said to herself that she would take the cat home and bury it after she went shopping. This thought gave the anguished Lucy some comfort.

Lucy pulled into the shopping mall parking lot. It was crowded with the cars of holiday shoppers, but she found a spot. Then she headed for the mall. As she reached the entrance she saw a large sign posted on the door. Did You Remember to Lock Your Car? it read. In smaller print the sign warned that during the holiday season there was always an increase in the number of thefts from parked cars, and that the management of the mall was not responsible for such thefts, and so on.

Had Lucy locked her car? She couldn't remember because the accident with the cat had upset her so much. She decided that it was best to go back and check. As she walked back toward her car she noticed a strange red-haired woman standing next to it, looking quickly around. Lucy stopped to see what would happen. As she watched, the woman furtively opened the back door to the car, which Lucy now realized that she had forgotten to lock, reached in, and pulled out the Bloomie's bag. The bag with the dead cat in it. The woman then walked quickly to another car and got in.

What was Lucy to do? Accuse the woman of stealing? There were no police around (there never were when you needed them). Besides, what had the woman taken? A bag with a dead cat in it! The police would laugh at her. Yet Lucy was outraged. This person had gone into her car and taken something that belonged to her. She couldn't be allowed to get away with it.

The red-haired woman had already started her own car and had begun to pull out of her parking space. Impulsively Lucy decided to follow the thief. The woman headed down the highway and pulled into another shopping mall a few miles away. She parked her car, and Lucy noticed that she was clutching the stolen Bloomingdale's bag when she got out. She looked very nervous. Perhaps this was the first time she had ever stolen anything.

Perhaps she knew or at least suspected that she was being followed. Lucy didn't care, she was too angry.

Lucy followed the red-haired woman into the mall. For a while she seemed to be wandering aimlessly, the Bloomingdale's bag still firmly in her grasp. Then she spotted what she had been looking for—a bar. She went in, with Lucy still following at a discreet distance. Lucy was now convinced the woman did not know she was being followed.

The red-haired woman sat down at a table in the darkest corner of the bar. She was obviously tired and frightened. The waitress appeared quickly and she ordered a drink. Then she looked around very carefully. Feeling sure she was not being watched, the red-haired woman very carefully slipped her fingers inside the stolen bag she had been holding so tightly.

Her face registered uncertainty as she reached deeper and deeper into the bag. Her hand inside the bag began to move around frantically. Then, abandoning all caution, she picked up the bag, looked inside, screamed, and fainted.

The people in the bar had no idea what had happened, and Lucy certainly didn't want to tell them. They were unable to revive the red-haired woman, who had not only fainted but struck her head on the leg of the table as she was slipping to the floor. She was bleeding badly, and an ambulance was sent for.

Within a few moments the woman was strapped to a stretcher and was about to be carried away.

The waitress said, "Just a second. I'm sure she wouldn't want to lose this." And very gently she laid the Bloomingdale's bag across the stomach of the woman on the stretcher.

There are many, many different versions of the cat-in-the-package theme. In one of them, a family that has been picking mushrooms want to see if what they have picked is safe or poisonous. So they test it on the cat—obviously

not a nice family—but they get their comeuppance. For a while the cat looks fine, so they all settle down for a nice mushroom omelet. Then Junior looks out the window, and there is the cat on the front lawn—dead.

In a panic the family rushes to the hospital to have their respective stomachs pumped. When they return home after the exhausting and painful ordeal, they find a note on their door from a neighbor. In the note he apologizes for running over their cat and killing it.

Screams in the Night

There was a man who lived with his young son and daughter in a cabin way out in the woods. His wife had died many years earlier. The man lived by hunting and fishing. Every day he had to go into the woods, leaving his children alone in the isolated cabin for hours. He didn't want to do this, but there was no other way he could get food for his family.

One day while the man was out hunting in the woods, he suddenly began to feel very cold, and he started shivering all over. The man knew somehow that something had gone wrong at home, but he didn't know what. He rushed back through the woods to the cabin. Inside he found the little girl crouching in a corner and crying hysterically. The little boy was nowhere around. When he asked the little girl what had happened, she just became more hysterical.

Though the man searched the entire area, he could find no trace of his son. He often asked the girl what had happened that day, but she would never say anything.

A year went by, and as it does, life went on. The man went back to his old habits of hunting and fishing all day, and the girl stayed home alone in the cabin. It had to be that way, otherwise the man and his daughter would starve.

One day when the man was out in the woods, the same cold feeling that he had had on the day his son disappeared came over him. Once again he knew that something was terribly wrong at home. He rushed back to the cabin, but as he feared, he found it empty. The girl was gone. He searched the cabin and the surrounding woods, but he could find no trace of her. By nightfall he was exhausted. He decided that there was nothing more he could do in the dark. It would be best to try to get some sleep and start searching again in the morning. So he lay down and tried to sleep, but he couldn't. His eyes simply wouldn't close.

He kept thinking about what might have happened and where the missing children might be. Then he suddenly had a thought. In all his searching, he had never looked in the attic of the cabin. So he decided to get up and take a look in the attic.

Naturally, he was more than a little nervous about what he might find up there. And he decided that if there was anything in the attic, he didn't want it to hear him coming. He didn't put on his shoes and he didn't take a flashlight, so that he would be able to creep up on whatever it was without being seen or heard.

He crept up the stairs barefoot and in the dark. He was very careful not to make a sound. Slowly and silently he pushed open the door to the attic at the top of the stairs and stepped in. . . .

YAHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

In telling this story, you end with a scream. And then you wait until those sitting around recover, and someone asks: "What happened? Why did he scream?"

The answer is: "You'd scream too if you stepped barefoot on broken glass."

_____

The man lay in bed, in semidarkness, watching the thing at the end of the bed move back and forth. He had seen it there every night for the past week. This night he was determined to fix it once and for all.

Slowly he reached down under the bed where he had placed his shotgun. He picked the gun up noiselessly and raised the sight to his eyes. And the thing disappeared.

So he put the gun back down on the floor, and the thing appeared once again. Once again he picked up the gun and raised the sight to his eyes. And the thing disappeared.

This time he decided not to put the gun down. He just waited until the thing appeared again. When it did, he took careful aim, pulled the trigger and . . .

EYAHHHHHHHHH!

When someone finally asks what happened, you reply, "He shot off his big toe."

These are just two examples of a popular genre of tale known, for obvious reasons, as scream stories. Both of these tales have humorous endings, but that is not necessary in this type of story. Anyone who has ever been to summer camp should be familiar with such tales, for they are commonly used by counselors to terrify their young charges at night.

Possibly the most familiar of all of the scream stories is "The Golden Arm," which was made famous by Mark Twain. It is about the man who steals his wife's golden arm from her grave and is pursued by her ghost. The ghost gets ever closer and moans, "Where is my golden armmmmm?" For the punch line the teller shouts in the ghostly voice, "You've got it!" and then grabs someone sitting close by.

Modern Ghosts

Traditionally, the ghosts of pale knights and gray ladies have wandered the drafty corridors of Gothic castles. But today very few live in castles, Gothic or otherwise, and the supply of pale knights and gray ladies has dropped significantly. It's hard to imagine a ghostly pale knight clanking and groaning while riding up and down in the elevator of a twenty-story apartment building or of a gray lady carrying her head down the corridor of a suburban high school.

Still, the ghosts have not disappeared—not by any means. They have merely changed form. Here are some contemporary examples.

In New Orleans teenagers are warned to stay out of the park at night because of the ghost of Marie. In life Marie was a young girl very much in love with a fellow named Bob. She had become pregnant by him, and she wanted to marry him.

Bob had other ideas. He was young and wild and didn't want to be saddled with a wife and kid early in life. So one night he took Marie walking in the park, and when they reached a deserted spot he stabbed her to death. Bob hoped that the killing would be attributed to some unknown sex maniac, but he wasn't too clever, and there was plenty of evidence indicating he was the killer.

The police brought him in and he broke down and confessed almost at once. He's still in jail today.

Marie was not satisfied with human justice. Her spirit now haunts the park where she was killed. The ghost carries the bloody knife that she was murdered with, and it is said that she takes a horrible, unspeakable revenge on any young man caught in the park at night.

———————

At the University of Indiana there are some very old buildings. One of them, a girls' dorm, is haunted. This, according to the stories that have been told by generations of Indiana students, is how the haunting came about.

The dorm had once been a men's dorm, and there was a medical student who lived in a room on the third floor. He had been sneaking his girlfriend into the room for some time. One evening when they were up in his room together, she told him that she was pregnant and that they would have to get married.

The medical student felt that his whole future would be ruined. Everything he had worked for and dreamed of was crumbling. He would never be able to finish medical school. And besides, he didn't like the girl anymore.

He became enraged, almost insane. He grabbed for one of the knives that medical students use in dissection and stabbed her in the throat. She died instantly, without making a sound.

The medical student then waited until it was very late at night and the corridors of the dorm were deserted.

He carried the girl's body down into the building's huge basement and hid it in an unused passageway, hoping that it would never be found. But after the girl was missing for a few days the police began to suspect the medical student who was known to be her boyfriend. They arrested him and he confessed to what he had done and led them to the body.

But the murdered girl's ghost still haunts the old buiding, which was turned into a girls' dorm. Those who have seen it says she has long black hair and wears a yellow nightgown.

_____

Among Chicanos there is a ghostly figure that is widely known and much feared. It is La Llorna—the weeping woman. No one knows the ghostly figure's real name or the details of her life and death. But this much is agreed upon: In life she was a young woman who had several children. She fell hopelessly in love with a bad, wild man who didn't like children and

didn't want them around, so in an act of desperate love the woman drowned her own chidren. Then she was so overcome with remorse that she drowned herself.

Now the figure with long black hair blowing wildly in the wind and eyes red from constant weeping wanders

up and down along the banks of the river crying for her lost children, it is considered extremely bad luck to see La Llorna. or even to hear her crying, and many of those who have reported the apparition, have died within the year.

_____

At Camp Strongbow there was a regular initiation for new boys. The counselors would take each out in the woods alone and tell him that he had to pass a survival test. The test was to see if the camper could survive on his own in the woods for a week. The counselors would then hand the terrified camper a hunting knife and three matches and tell him that they would be back in a week to pick him up.

Of course, it was a joke. The new campers had to spend only one night in the woods. When the counselors came to get them the next morning, most boys were so happy to be rescued that they couldn't get mad at the joke that had been played on them.

A couple of years ago the counselors at Camp Strongbow took a new camper out into the woods and told him the story of having to survive for a week alone. This particular boy was from a big city and had never been in the woods before. Besides, he was very timid, so when the counselors left him with his knife and three matches he was really scared.

Early the next morning the counselors went to pick the boy up, but they couldn't find him. It seems he had been able to build a fire—they found a small pile of charred wood and two spent matches—but the boy was nowhere around. The counselors searched all day but couldn't find him. The next day the state police were called in, and they brought bloodhounds. Still, no clue to the fate of the missing camper was ever discovered.

The practice of initiating new campers by taking them off into the woods was stopped. In fact, Camp Strongbow was closed down and had to reopen under another name.

But many people have seen a mysterious light in the woods around the camp during the summer. When the source of the light is discovered, people find the remains of a small campfire and two spent matches. But there is never a trace of the person who built the fire.

———————

At Paola High School there was once a trumpet player who played second chair, that is, he was number two in the trumpet section. He was an ambitious young man, very anxious to make first chair. He practiced and practiced, and although he was very good, he was never quite good enough to make first chair. Still, he kept on practicing.

One night when the band was playing out at the football stadium, the band director sent this boy back to the high school for some equipment that had been forgotten. The equipment was stored in a room above the stage. There

was a winding flight of metal stairs leading to the storage room. The footing on the stairs was tricky, and when the trumpeter was coming down the stairs, his arms full of equipment, he slipped, banged his head on the metal stairs, and was killed.

Even today, practically any time you drive past the main door of the high school you can hear him practicing, still trying to make first chair.

The story of the Indiana University ghost was collected by Terresa House. The ghostly trumpeter was collected by Anne Schlaegel and comes from the William E. Koch Folklore Collection.

The Very Old Man

Louise Curtis had just graduated from nursing school, and she felt that she had been very lucky to land a job in one of the big, fancy private hospitals. She was terribly, terribly anxious to do well in her new job.

To tell the truth, Louise wasn't the brightest person in the world. She had gotten through school by working twice as hard as anybody else. She intended to get through her job the same way. Louise was at the hospital early every day. She never left until the job she was doing was completed, even if it meant working an hour or two overtime. She never complained about extra work.

But most of all, Louise Curtis followed orders. If the head nurse told her to change the sheets, she would change the sheets. If the head nurse told her that all the patients in the ward had to have orange juice at 11 A.M., they would have orange juice at 11 A.M. even if they didn't want it and didn't need it. You could count on that. Louise was a good soldier. Once she was given an order she carried it out—without questioning and without grumbling—even if the order didn't make any sense.

This quality didn't make Louise very popular with the other nurses. "She's just like a robot," they would say. "Wind her up and she walks, and if she hits a wall she keeps right on walking till she runs down."

"She certainly doesn't have any initiative," said one of the kinder nurses. "But you have to admit she's a hard worker."

"So's a mule," said an angry nurse. "She'll never get anywhere because she hasn't got any brains. But the administration will always use her example to try to make the rest of us look bad. You're always hearing things like, 'Nurse Curtis doesn't mind cleaning all the bedpans,' or 'Nurse Curtis doesn't mind working an extra shift.' I'm sick of hearing about what Nurse Curtis will do."

Although the other nurses wouldn't speak quite that frankly, most of them agreed.

The head nurse, of course, realized Louise's shortcomings and her good points. One day she went up to Louise and said, "Nurse Curtis, I've had my eye on you for quite a while now. You're not like most of the women today. You're a hard worker and you know how to follow directions. So I have a special job for you."

She led Louise through a long corridor into a part of the hospital she had never been in before. At the end of the corridor was a locked room. The head nurse took a key that she wore on a chain around her neck and unlocked the door. Before she opened the door she said,

"Nurse Curtis, what you see and hear from now on is for you, and you alone. It is never to be spoken of to anyone except me. Do you understand?"

Louise said she did.

"Good girl," said the head nurse. "I knew you could be trusted."

She then opened the door and led Louise inside. The room contained an astonishing array of medical machinery, some of which Louise recognized but much of which was totally unfamiliar to her. At the center of the room there was a bed, and on the bed was a very old man. The thin, corpselike figure did not move. Wires and tubes led to various parts of the body. The only signs of life from the old man's form were very faint breathing and the responses of the various monitoring machines to which he was attached. Some wires and tubes led from machines that kept him alive. Others led to machines that kept track of the faint flickering of life that remained within the shrunken body.

The old man's face looked vaguely familiar to Louise.

"Do you recognize him?" asked the head nurse. Louise shook her head.

"Of course he's changed a good deal, but that's ———" The nurse spoke a name that anyone would recognize.

Louise gasped. "I thought he was dead. He died years ago.

"The world thinks he's dead. But as you can see, he isn't. There's no telling how long he can go on this way. Now, your special duties are to come into this room three times a day to take the readings from these machines and record them on this chart. You are to change the fluids in these containers, and to . . ." The head nurse went through a long list of instructions. Finally she said, "This is most important. Under no circumstances are you to touch the patient. *Don't touch him!*"

Louise understood what she was supposed to do. Being diligent, she came into the locked room three times a day and did everything she was supposed to do. She followed her instructions to the letter. She never talked to anyone but the head nurse about what she did. And she never touched the body of the old man. The head nurse was very pleased with Louise's work.

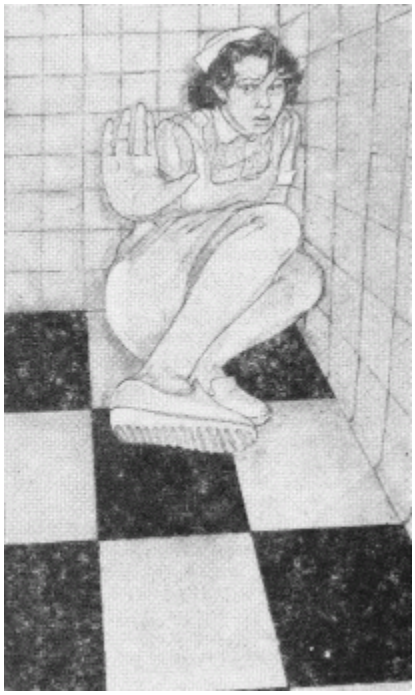
Louise did not have much imagination or curiosity, but after a few months even she became a bit curious. Day after day the patient just lay there without moving, barely breathing. The readings on the machine were always the same. Nothing ever seemed to change. Why, she began to wonder, can't I touch him? In his condition, he would never even feel it.

The thought grew in Louise's mind until it became very nearly an obsession. Many days she would go into the room and reach out, nearly but not quite touching the old man. It was beginning to drive her mad.

Then one day she could stand it no longer. She reached out and touched the old man lightly on the arm. Instantly his eyes opened. It was the first time that Louise had seen any movement other than shallow breathing in the corpselike figure. Then his head turned from side to side, until he fixed his staring eyes on Louise. She stepped back from the bed in terror.

The frail form sat up, pulling out a mass of tubes and wires, spilling fluids all over the bed, and starting the machines beeping and whirring frantically. A second later the old man was on his feet and advancing slowly toward Louise. His eyes were glazed and his mouth hung half open. That sight propelled Louise into action. She dashed for the door, but found that it had

iocked automatically when she shut it. The old man was coming closer and closer.



She ran to a corner of the room. With surprising speed the old man followed her. She ran to another corner. Again he followed, this time getting closer. She ran again, and again the old haan followed.

Louise was beginning to get tired, but the horrible old man seemed to gain strength each time she ran. Finally she felt she was trapped and could run no more.

The old man reached out a skeletonlike hand and touched Louise's shoalder, causing her to shudder.

"Tag!" shouted the old man. "Now you're it!"